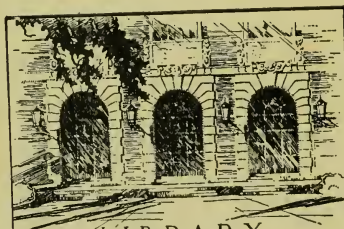


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HIGH AND LOW;

OR,

LIFE'S CHANCES AND CHANGES.

BY THE HON. HENRY COKE,

AUTHOR OF

“A RIDE OVER THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HIGH AND LOW.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the Cathedral towns of England, as you enter from ——, the road gradually becomes a street. The town begins with a huge red brick eyesore, which you at once know to be the Union. Then comes a public-house with tea-gardens attached to the premises; the resort of village swains and of stout labouring men, who play at skittles, drink beer and smoke short pipes; and of sallow-faced townsmen, who drink brandy-and-water and smoke long

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Gen. New Hall to the N. of Reading, 20.

pipes, and have secret cock-fightings in an outhouse, which illegal pursuits the landlord winks at because these sort of men sing capital songs, and bring custom on week-days as well as Sundays. Then comes a row of almshouses, quite new, and hardly finished. They make one wonder, when one reflects that almshouses always are either new or unfinished, whether there be more almsgivers in these days; or whether, which is not so pleasing a reflection, there be more almstakers and almswanters than there used to be in the "good old times." Further on is a rickety line of tumble-down tenements, whose upper story is a garret with gable windows, and dangerously cracked and rain-stained ceilings. On the threshold are little gates, which little children are often seen struggling to get over, or where perhaps an ancient hag is leaning, who looks like the undying contemporary of her tottering abode. Joining these is, perhaps, a fat and greasy butcher's shop,

with a dead pig hanging up, whose very white skin and very red nose make him look cold in the hottest weather. Then a harness-maker's, a baker's, and so on.

But opposite this line of buildings, all on one side of the road, is a patch of green, railed in by a double row of pollard lime trees, now in full blossom.

From one corner of it, the path under the lime trees leads into the churchyard; from the other, if you enter by a small white gate and walk through a neat little garden and shrubbery, you come to a square house of evident respectability. It has no pretensions to more than mediocrity in house rank; but would decidedly occupy a distinguished position amongst those members of the brick and mortar family well known as the white front, green door, and brass knocker, class.

Inside, it is the perfection of comfort; and in truth the drawing-room wears a decided

pretension to luxury, with its Brussels' carpets, embroidered chairs, and general amiability of furniture. The windows are wide open, and the gentle breeze blows in a gale of fragrance, over a magnificent crop of mignonette, boxed up outside the sill.

No man, the least versed in domestic idiosyncracies, could contemplate the aggregate physiognomy of that room — bearing in mind its component parts, particularly one of them, namely, a writing-table bestrewed with what the French graphically term *charmantes inutilités*, no one—we say, could make use of his eyes and other senses in this apartment without feeling a positive and very pleasing conviction, that woman dwelt in its vicinity. If, gentle visitor, you carry your admiring glance round the room, and peep into the recess of the end window, you will receive a still more positive proof that your surmises are correct. There she sits.

If you admire a dark beauty, with raven

tresses, we are sorry to disappoint you. If you are inconsolable, because your heroine has not golden locks and eyes like firmaments, we are equally sorry not to accommodate you. One thing we will answer for, if you only take her all in all as you find her, the fault must be in your own taste or imagination, if you do not fall in love with her at first sight. Of course, no disparaging insinuations are here meant to others equally charming; and we take it for granted that we are not suspected of encouraging infidelity in the breast of any man.

There she sits. Were we scribbling to swell the pages of fiction, we might fill book-cases with portraits, painted in all the rainbow hues contained in the vast recesses of Imagination's colour-box. Were she a mere "airy nothing" of the brain, we could describe her with perfectly circumstantial accuracy, from the bump of veneration on one extremity, to the remarkably dandy bow on her shoe at the other. But alas, she is an

every-day reality, a girl of nineteen; so interesting, so pretty, that any attempt to describe her must at once annihilate both Truth and Romance.

She is sitting at the window. A water-colour drawing half finished is lying on the table before her. She has just put down her pencil, and has taken up a letter, which she reads aloud.

“Dear Sir,

“I am anxious to see you on business of a pressing and important nature, and hope to find you at home when I come to-morrow or the next day. Pray give my kindest and most affectionate remembrances to Mary, and believe me to be

“Yours truly,

“GERARD WINTER.”

“P.S.—It is possible I may leave town to-morrow by the two o’clock train, and shall reach Mossbank Cottage in time for dinner.”

The girl leaned back into the room, till she could, by so doing, command a sight of the clock.

“Why, it’s only four. I wonder if that stupid clock has stopped?” And, in order to satisfy her doubt she jumped up and ran towards the suspected time-piece. On it went, tick, tick, to the most provokingly monotonous tune, unconscious of its stupidity, and apparently quite unaware that there could be such a thing as impatience in the world.

“I should think he would like the green room best; he used to say it was the snuggest room in the house. I wonder the room his father died in, should not recall—but perhaps, that is the reason he likes it. He has so much good feeling. I wonder if he will know who did the drawing over his chimney-piece. I wish this had been finished. It is far prettier and better done too, than that; but then he must remember the abbey where we picnicked. He told

me it was the pleasantest picnic he ever was at. I should like to know why it was so pleasant to him."

Here the young lady resumed her brush, and washed in a very bold foreground of raw sienna and brown madder, making the drawing look as if it had been sitting with its feet in a mud bath.

"Poor Gerard!" she mused, half aloud, turning her pretty little head from side to side, as she questioned with half closed eyes the result of the mud bath. "Poor Gerard! what an age it is since he was here. I can't help thinking he has forgotten all about us amongst his gay London friends. What with balls and—I wonder what a London ball is like; it must be very different to the race balls at ——. There must be so many pretty people. Much prettier than — heigho! What a very stupid brush this is! How very odd it is Gerard does not marry; no sensible girl would ever refuse him, I should

think. But then it must be something very captivating, or he would not fall in love. He is so tremendously particular, poor boy ! I cannot think what his important business can be with papa ; it must be something to do with marriage settlements. I should so like to see him happily married. It would be very shocking never to see him any more, though. How funny it would be to have him living here with his wife. Mrs. Winter ! Mrs. Winter ! how strange the name sounds ! Mrs. Winter and I, would have to be immense friends. I should go out walking with her, and drive her about to see the poor people, and take it by turns to read to them. Then we should draw together, and sing duets, and talk together about Gerard — we should never get tired of talking of Gerard. Then he would hunt and shoot—and what else would he do ? I am afraid he would find poor papa very dull. Dear papa ! he is so fond of business

—I am sure he is making himself quite ill with that horrid business. He never leaves the office now, and when he does, he looks so tired and worn, it is quite painful to see him. He promised to take a walk with me before dinner. I must go and put my bonnet on or we shan't be back before Gerard comes."

CHAPTER II.

BEHIND the house, detached from the main building, and separated by the stable-yard, was a smaller one, containing two rooms on the ground floor. In the first of these rooms, at a high desk hidden from the entrance by a venetian screen, sat two attorney's clerks. One of them had just finished applying splinters and bandages to the stem of a black meerschaum pipe, and was now busily engaged in cutting deep circles in the mahogany, with a pair of big iron compasses. The other had

his head buried in his crossed arms, and appeared to be asleep.

Every one, who has read Dickens, must be perfectly familiar with both the live and dead furniture of an attorney's office. With such exquisitely finished pictures suspended round the walls of his memory, it would be presumption to offend the reader's taste, by offering to his notice an ordinary sketch; did we not feel confident that, were the reader in this office, he would pause to consider the strange outward appearance of the first-named of these two clerks, before he paid the slightest attention to the conversation which presently ensued between them.

Mr. Posthumus Mobbs—such is the singular name of this singular little man—considered in an indefinite point of view, that is, without reference to this or any other history, would justly merit not only inspection, but an accurate and detailed description.

In this particular history, however, the part he is destined to play, though of the utmost importance, is so very short, that we feel compelled to dismiss him with a mere outline of his peculiarities.

Taken from the stool on which he was now perched, he measured little more in height than that piece of furniture: possibly in his stockings he might be a quarter of an inch below it. He was thin—unpleasantly thin; but with his activity of mind and body it could not be otherwise. At first sight the point about him, which at once caught the eye, was his wig. In fact it was a very characteristic wig; and formed no small item in the general remarkableness of the wearer. It might easily have been mistaken for a piece of door-mat. Its fiery and perverse stubbles were parted down the centre by a neutral ground of brown net. In the very front, a wet brush kept the bristles in a tolerably subdued state; but behind, the dust of many ages

had accumulated in such masses, that nothing short of a carpet beating could have dislodged it. The wig always had a peculiar cock; thus leaving a vast expanse of baldness on the back of his head: and while its consequent protrusion in front gave him a marked resemblance to a monkey, the complex lines of wrinkles about the corners of his eyes and mouth, entitling him to as much affinity with the corresponding features of a cockatoo or mackaw.

“Mr. Taylor,” said this comical compound to his drowsy companion on the other side of the desk, “I say, Mr. Taylor, what a very silent young man you are. Now if I was in your circumstances I shouldn’t take it to heart so. You ought to cheer up, now you’re going away for a change of air.”

“Take it to heart!” said Mr. Taylor, looking at the speaker with a pair of heavy, sunken eyes, “take it to heart! — take what to heart, Posthumus?”

“ It? *you* know. Come, why don't you disgorge it, and have done with it; instead of cherishing the boa-constrictor in your own vitals, and poisoning the peace and harmony, the happiness and prosperity of our scholastic occupations! True happiness—the secret of true happiness—depend upon it, Mr. Taylor—the secret—I say, are you listening? the secret of true happiness depends upon getting rid of misery as quick as you can.”

Whether Mr. Taylor was roused by the startling truth just propounded by Posthumus, or whether he dreaded the continuous attacks of the fidgetty little philosopher, it is difficult to say. He raised his head; and as if with the view of changing the subject from himself, inquired of Posthumus if he knew the reason of his master's close application to business within the last few weeks.

“ He gives us little or nothing to do,” he said, “ but works all day long himself.”

“You see,” said Posthumus, with a knowing wink, “it’s my private opinion, Mr. Taylor, there is a screw loose somewhere. There’s a sleeping partner in this firm. We needn’t mention names, Mr. Taylor, but my private opinion of that sleeping partner is, that he is a remarkably wide awake young gentleman.”

“Mr. Winter, you mean?” said Taylor, “I have heard some awkward reports of him before. Didn’t you say the other day he was expected to marry Miss Bellerby?”

“There was a rumour of that nature, Mr. Taylor. Of course we do not pretend to say how true. But between ourselves, I am of opinion Mr. Winter has an eye to that investment; and a very snug business might be made of it too.”

“Do you think her father would give his consent?”

Posthumus closed his eyes and shook his head, till the dust flew out of his wig.

“That putty won’t prove adhesive, Mr. Taylor. Mr. Bellerby has a sharp eye, and knows the shape of a hoof when he sees it, as well as most men.”

“But the lady?”

“I fear, Sir, she listens to the voice of the charmer too willingly. To be sure, I know nothing of these matters; but I have seen ’em together, and—but that’s a long time since. Mr. Winter is to be here this evening; we shall then see how the wind blows.”

“How do you know he is coming, Posthumus?”

“Happened to see his note quite accidentally; but it caught my eye.”

“You seem to pick up a good deal of accidental information,” observed the little man’s companion. “If it really is the case that Mr. Winter is to be here this evening, I only hope he will arrive before I go. I have a singular desire to see that man: I once knew a person of the same

name. It can't be him though—no, no, that's not possible. I wonder, Mobbs, if Mr. Bellerby would send you down to Yorkshire instead of me, to look after the Weyton estate. It would just suit you now to be away for a week or ten days; it would be as good as a holiday for you."

"Gracious heavens! Mr. Taylor, what are you talking of, Sir? I go to Yorkshire, and leave Mrs. Mobbs and family here! Bless you, if I am away for one day, she is afraid I have been assassinated, and is preparing, by the time I get back, to put the whole family into mourning. Besides it's just time for you to be off; you've got all your instructions from the master and the sooner you're out of the house the better."

"Well, I suppose I must go. It doesn't much matter to me where I am. You put all the Weyton papers into my bag, did you?"

"Yes; they're all there. I hope you'll

have a pleasant time of it, Mr. Taylor, and come back without having your throat cut—and look a little more cheerful when I see you again. I dare say you won't be away more than a fortnight. If you do see anybody that asks after me, you may as well give 'em a sixpence. It won't ruin you, Mr. Taylor ; I dare say no body in Yorkshire ever heard of me."

Not long after the melancholy-looking clerk had taken his leave of the attorney's office, and while Posthumus was, for the hundredth time, canvassing in his mind all the possible causes of his fellow scrivener's sadness, and was reducing this investigation to the form of a mathematical problem, with the aid of the compasses, on the mahogany desk, there came a tap at the door, which opened and admitted a tall man of gentlemanlike appearance.

"Is Mr. Bellerby within?" inquired the stranger.

"He is, Sir," answered Posthumus ; and

without more ado the gentleman knocked at the inner door of the office, entered the inner apartment, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER III.

AT an *escritoire* in the corner of the room, between the two windows, sat the attorney. He was a spare man, dressed in black. His long grey locks were parted in the centre of a low, receding forehead. His features were careworn and anxious. His eye was bright and piercing. As the door opened, he started and turned to look at the intruder. Hastily shutting down the lid of the *escritoire*, he rose and held out his hand.

“I am glad to see you looking so well,

Winter. Here, take the arm-chair. Charming weather, isn't it? Country looking beautiful?"

"Very much so. I came to see you on business, Mr. Bellerby."

Mr. Bellerby winced.

"So you informed me by letter. Anything that I can do for you, I am sure I shall be very happy;" Mr. Bellerby fidgetted in his chair.

"I dare say, Mr. Bellerby, you can guess the object of this visit."

"Not I, my dear Sir; I am no conjurer. Nothing gone wrong with you—I mean—I hope—that is—no unpleasant communication to meke?"

"Rather so. I want money."

Mr. Bellerby's fingers nervously grasped a handful of shillings in his pockets.

"Unfortunate—very unfortunate. I fear you will be obliged to borrow at an exorbitant rate of interest just now. The price of money has risen very much lately.

But with good securities—good securities I dare say you might—”

“I might do much, I don’t doubt; but you know as well as I do that all my securities are in your hands. You must advance more money on the same securities. If I don’t repay you, you will still be a gainer. You know you bought my father’s business for a mere trifle; and cheated me of half my fortune when he was on his death-bed.”

“Mr. Winter! what do you mean to—”

“Pish! We understand each other now. I want money, and you must lend it.”

“On my honour, Winter, I cannot lend you money. You have nearly ruined me, as it is. The last remittance I made you, was borrowed on my daughter’s fortune.”

“It is a lie.”

“Winter, I swear it!”

“Then what am I to do? I am not going to starve, while you have your miserly

coffers full to the brim. What am I to do, I say?"

The attorney thought for a moment, and covered his face with his hands as if to keep off the keen looks of the other.

"Have you no rich friend?" he presently asked, screwing his sharp features into a look of deep cunning.

"Only one that I could bleed, and he has no ready money; d—n him!"

"Hem!" said the attorney, apparently at a loss to suggest any other scheme. "What's to be done!"

"What's to be done! I'll tell you what's to be done:" said Winter. "He can give you good securities; lend him the money!"

"What securities?" inquired the attorney.

"Land:" said the other.

"But how do you know he is willing to embarrass his estate by mortgage?"

"He must, if he has no money."

“Is he extravagant?”

“Yes, he gambles, and will soon be ruined; and you—”

“Foreclose and get possession of the estate at half its value,” whispered the attorney.

“Exactly so.” said Winter, as he watched the twinkling eyes in the cunning face before him.

“Is the property a valuable one?” asked Mr. Bellerby.

“One of the most valuable of its size in England!” was the answer.

“Do you think this can be managed?” whispered the attorney in a confidential tone of voice. “How much money will he want?”

“That depends. Perhaps five or six thousand pounds.”

“And if I raise that sum, will you secure me the mortgage?”

“On one condition,” said Winter.

“Name it.”

“That you advance me a thousand without any more securities.”

“ Winter, it can’t be done.”

“ Well then, you lose the estate. Remember, his ruin depends on me !”

“ But how will you ruin him ? and how do I know, if I lend you the money without securities, that you will keep your word ; or that you have any such friend to ruin ?”

“ I tell you I have such a friend. You know the estate ; it is in the adjoining county ; his name is More of Moreton : and, I swear to you, if you lend me this sum, I will ruin him and place his property in your hands.”

This was said in rather a loud tone : but had it been much less loud, there was an ear at the keyhole that still might have heard it plain enough.

Mr. Bellerby shuddered.

“ I cannot consent to such—such—”

“ Villainy. Come, out with it !”

“ Never !” said the old man, jumping from his chair. “ I will not do it.”

A fiendish expression of contempt and

malevolence passed over Winter's features. He glanced cautiously round the room: then bending forward towards the attorney, he slowly whispered;

"If not, your daughter—"

"Ah," exclaimed the old man, starting from his seat, "what would you with her?"

"Nothing, nothing. But you know how she loves me. You know the power I have over her. Hesitate, and she is ruined."

"Villain!" gasped the attorney with a voice of agony. "It's a lie! She does not love you! Let me pass, I will tell her all!"

"Ay, do so; tell her all: and let her know her father is a greater villain than her lover. And tell her, for if you will not I must, that forgery—that forgery, mind—is punished with transportation."

Mr. Bellerby grasped the back of his chair for support.

At this moment, the attorney's daughter entered the apartment.

“Dearest papa! I have been knocking for five minutes at least. What have you been about? How do you do, Mr. Winter? I want to get papa out for a walk before dinner. He locks himself up in this close room all day long. See how pale he looks now. Come, papa dear, here’s your hat and stick!”

She had shaken hands with Mr. Winter, as if she was thinking of nothing but her dear papa; but whether from the exertion of knocking at the door, or of carrying Mr. Bellerby’s hat and stick, there certainly was more colour than usual on her cheeks; which Mr. Winter possibly attributed to a totally different cause.

In the course of their walk before dinner, Winter, who had given his arm to Miss Bellerby, contrived to make her of the opinion that he had grown more agreeable than ever since their last meeting.

He told her endless anecdotes about his London friends. In all his stories, he was

the hero. She thought she never should get tired of listening to him. He made it very clear to her, that London was the most delightful place in the world, with one exception; and when he refused to name that one place, he heaved a sigh that brought the roses to Mary's cheeks in an instant. Poor Mary would have given anything to have made him name that place; so as to be quite certain she was not mistaken in believing it to be Mossbank Cottage. Yet when she thought of it afterwards, she was satisfied in her own mind, that there could be no other place, which Gerard liked so well as Mossbank; not so much, perhaps, for any one particular reason, as for old associations of times when he was a boy, and used to teach her to play at cricket on the green, and laugh at her, because she could not run like a boy, or throw a ball like a boy: when he used to come to Mossbank for his happy holidays, and everybody was

pleased to see him home again; and how he used to hide behind the door if she was out of the way when he came back, and jump out and frighten her into a laugh and a scream, and then kiss her, and call her little Moll, as if they had been brother and sister. Now, it was such a long time since she had seen him; he had been travelling ever since he left College, and had lived so much in London, it was impossible to address him in any way but as Mister Winter: and it would have been absurd to have shown, how excited she was when he came, as, probably, he was not the least thinking about her.

By degrees, Winter changed the Miss Bellerby for "Mary," and Miss Bellerby found herself calling Mr. Winter "Gerard" quite as naturally as if they had never been separated. In the evening, after dinner, Winter admired Miss Bellerby's drawing; but declared, on his honour, that it was not half

so charming as the one up-stairs over the chimney-piece in his room ; which he assured her he recognised as the pic-nic ruin the moment he saw it. He wished he had a copy of it, and was even bold enough to ask permission to carry off the picture itself ; but he asked with such a melancholy air, that Mary thought she had never seen him look so handsome before. The little coquette was half disposed to refuse him for the sake of another melancholy look ; and although she gave the drawing, as if she valued it more than anything belonging to her, she would, if the truth was known, have given him all the drawings she possessed, and, indeed, have done anything in the world her kind nature could think of to please that fascinating creature.

Her father, all the time the young couple were billing and cooing together, sat in an arm-chair with his head back, as if he was asleep : but he was not likely to sleep, when he knew so well the character of the man

who was stealing from him that priceless treasure—his daughter's heart. Distinctly he heard every syllable that passed between them, as if his life depended on having to repeat their conversation word for word. He saw the cold grey eyes of Winter reading the tender thoughts which beamed in the sweet expression of his daughter's face. He saw him whisper ; and he saw her blush. He saw Winter's hand as if by accident touching hers. He could have screamed with rage, or seized the large bread-knife from the tea-table and killed the viper at a blow ; but Winter's last words, as his daughter came into the office, chained him hand and mouth.

He fixed his eyes upon the black chimney : and there he pictured to himself a long sea voyage, and gales and storms hurling him on through thousands of miles of frothy waves and grey dull space, further and further from all he loved—and worse—further and further from all that loved him. If it was only separation, he might learn to bear it ;

but beyond, to the place where he was going, were clanking chains, and hideous, short-cropped heads which swelled all over with bumps of villainy. And these were to be his friends and mates for life! And instead of Brussels carpet, and embroidered chairs, and Mossbank Cottage, and above all—far, far above all—Mary, an angel who loved, who prayed for him, who knew or dreamt not of any guilt in him; instead of these and her—chains, cropped heads, grinning murderers' faces, and a shining bayonet to make him work and groan, and groan and work. Poor old man, he reaped as he had sown. Bitter to him was the fruit of dishonesty.

Meanwhile, the two took no heed of Mr. Bellerby. Winter had learnt to sing; and she too had a voice for song. Their voices grew loud together and soft together; and the sham warmth of his pretended tenderness kindled sweet emotions in her fond heart. Those songs had never been more than

pretty songs before: from that time forth they were not forgotten by her.

The next day, Mary asked Mr. Winter, what business had brought him down from London? He told her it was the business of a friend; but would not enter into any particulars. She was, however, very anxious to know the particulars, and pressed him to tell them. Then he explained how a dear friend of his, who would not be guided by his advice, was an extravagant young man, and gambled and fooled away his money: and how he was now obliged to borrow money, and had come to him, to know where to get it. He, Winter, had hopes of procuring a certain portion of this sum from Mr. Bellerby, and was here with the view of negotiating between the two parties for the mortgage of Mr. More's estate.

"For whose estate did you say, Gerard?" inquired Miss Bellerby.

"Did I let his name slip?" said Winter,

“What a careless dog I am, to be sure! Well, you know all my secrets; I may as well tell you this. But can you keep a secret, Mary?”

“Oh yes, for ever!”

“Let me see if you can keep a secret.” And Winter took her little finger—the smallest of all her little fingers—and squeezed the end of it between his finger and thumb; and though he pinched very hard, she shut her little mouth, and looked as firm as a marble statue, but never uttered a word. Then he laughed and kissed the end of the finger he squeezed; whereat Mary looked angry and indignant.

“Well now, why don’t you tell me the secret? come—quick. You said something about mortgaging Mr. More’s estate. What Mr. More is that? I know one Mr. More: I hope it isn’t him.”

“The More I mean is More of Moreton.”

“Dear, how shocking! That’s the very one I know. I have met him at two of

the —— race balls, and he danced with me both times. • He is a little lame, and only dances quadrilles. He was so amiable and nice. How sorry I am he is going to lose his place. I remember he told me all about it; and I thought from his description, it must be the prettiest old place in England.”

“ So you were quite captivated with Mr. More, were you? Well there’s no accounting for taste,” said Winter, putting on an offended air and shrugging his shoulders.

“ I ! — nonsense ! I only said he was agreeable ; but is he really going to lose all his estate ? ”

“ No, he is only going to mortgage it ; but it is the fate of all these spendthrifts and gamblers. It would serve him right if he lost every penny.”

Mary thought Winter said this with a show of ill-feeling, which quite surprised and displeased her. But it was only for a moment that she ceased to smile. She soon

forgot all about Mr. More; and about everything else except the man she was talking to.

Once or twice, in the presence of her father, Winter had told Mary he must really take leave of Mossbank Cottage, and return to London; but when he spoke of going away, Mary looked so sad that he was obliged to agree with her in thinking it needless to be in such a hurry. Then she made her father ask Winter with his own mouth to stop a day or two longer. Poor old man! what a task for him to bring down ruin on himself and all he loved! But what could he do? He had gone on his knees to that heartless villain; he had given him the thousand pounds the very morning after his arrival. But Winter would not go, and said he must have another thousand. Another thousand! No Shylock ever looked at his glittering gold, and thought it more precious than did this old man when he remembered how for years he had hoarded it; and what power it had

to free him now, though but for a short time, from Winter's presence, and Winter's threats.

Day followed day, and the serpent wound new coils round his victim; and she, poor victim! resisted not her fate; but rather courted it, as innocence often will. Her guileless nature suspected no ill from any one. She loved all the world—and who would knowingly do her a wrong? Had not Winter told her that he loved her? Was it in her trusting nature to think herself more true than him? Assuredly she did think, not his nor any other creature's love could equal her own worshipful admiration for the object on which she chanced to concentrate it. But she believed he loved as he was able; and if she sometimes sighed to think his love a little cold, she was still generous, not too exacting. It was not her's to do things by halves; her heart needed an idol. She loved her father as fondly, with as much tender and respectful affection, as daughter

could. Then this to her mind was a thing of course, not a duty when done, but the worst of crimes left undone. She sought an object more exciting than this—not an everyday routine affair requiring no sacrifice, asking no thanks, but—a brighter ideal, a something which made her pulse throb to think of, a something she had often conjured up in her own brain, but that she had never known, yet was quite prepared to find, to know, to worship. And had she then at last—already found it? What was there in this man's look, voice, manner, words or address, to warrant such conclusion?

A mystery! It is a mystery, a madness, a contradiction as barefaced as noon-day to believe that vice is virtue, that guilt is innocence, that hideousness is loveliness; and then, forsooth, to wish to die a thousand deaths to prove it! In all *men's* eyes this indefinite fellow is an ass, a coxcomb, a very worthless thing indeed. Ask women how it is; and they will tell you, or

strongly hint it, that he is an angel in tailor's broadcloth. Oh!—believe them—and never had you seen or might again delight your senses with such incarnate perfection! The converse is just as true, with this exception; creation's lords with one consent pay homage to all forms of outward beauty: creation's ladies often dispense even with this accessory. All contrasts, most hateful to each other if unmasked, are bound together by mutual strugglings to that end, and then

—— “from *their* sleep
They wake to weep!”

and cry, “is all illusion? is there nothing left

‘But pale despair, and cold tranquillity?’”

At the end of a week, Winter had made considerable havoc with Miss Bellerby's heart. But that gentleman, whatever his intentions might be, was beginning to weary of his occupation as love maker. He was accustomed to playing desperate games; and

provided the stake was a high one, and the chances of winning or losing moderately even, his interest never flagged. The game once decided, his appetite for play was gone. If he must lose, why, there was no help for it; but if the turn of Fortune's wheel was evidently in his favour, he would decide the matter by grasping at the prize with a precipitancy that often made him a loser. He knew the danger of this tendency, and determined not to suffer through his own rashness on the present occasion.

But how to bring the matter to a termination? That Miss Bellerby loved him, was as clear to Winter as it was to the attorney. To marry her, however, formed no part of his present scheme. Yet it was necessary to keep up the delusion—to make both father and daughter believe that marriage was his intention—in order to obtain the second thousand pounds, the ransom money he was to extort from the old man as the price of the daughter's happiness.

There were moments when even his stony heart warmed with the influence of the girl's sweet nature. Passionless as he was, he could not be insensible to her beauty. But to relent, to feel remorse, or anything beyond the most transient pity, was as foreign to his purely selfish nature, as sunlight to the ocean's caves. He knew not how else to accomplish his design, and the effort it cost him to maintain the delusion began to weary and fatigue him. Old Bellerby saw his daughter's danger, yet still held back the ransom. How could Winter move him? He would threaten worse than marriage; and if the father could bear the threat, he could bear the reality. Mary Bellerby was a worthy victim. She was not the first, and she certainly was the most beautiful; there was no brother to give satisfaction to; only a miserly old wretch who, in all probability, would soon die broken-hearted—the sooner the better.

Such was the course Winter proposed to

himself as the most satisfactory one to adopt. Like many other plans, either good or bad, it was destined, at least for the present, to miscarry.

While these evil designs were passing through Winter's thoughts, the struggle in the attorney's mind between his affection for his daughter and the love for his money, ended in the victory of the first. He was not alarmed for his own safety, as respected the guilty act of which Winter had reminded him ; for he imagined he knew Winter's character well enough to be safe on that score—inasmuch as any exposure Winter made, must necessarily involve them both in the penalties which the law enforced. But he was alarmed on his daughter's account, and on her account alone. It was a matter of the greatest inconvenience to him at that moment to produce the required sum ; but by means, perhaps not strictly in accordance with honourable dealings, he had procured it ; and with a curse in his heart

he handed over the money ; not, however, until he had received a promise from Winter to leave the house next day. “ Go ! ” said the old man, trembling with passion, “ and unless you hold to your bond ; unless you accomplish the villainous scheme you have proposed ; unless you henceforth for ever keep without the precincts of these walls ; neither my own fate nor the fear of my daughter’s ruin shall save you from that retribution which will one day reward your crimes.”

The day of Winter’s departure was an unhappy day for Mary Bellerby. If she had not been perfectly happy all the time of his stay at Mossbank Cottage, she had been in an agreeable state of suspense ; she had built airy fabrics of every description of architecture—whether palace or cottage—one charm invested all—one magician’s wand bade them all rise. At his shrine she burnt her incense, was blinded in the smoke, and was well pleased to breathe or suffocate.

Her father's manner to Winter surprised and sometimes alarmed her. She saw there was no love between them : wherefore not, she could assign no cause, and racked her brains in vain to find one. Winter spoke of him to her with great respect ; was much concerned for his declining health ; and imputed to the infirmity of age the constant testiness of his manner. - He, Winter, was delighted to find Mr. Bellerby had said no unkind things of him to Mary ; and convinced her, as he had power to do, that her father was sorry he was about to leave them. He touched more than once upon the declining health—the advanced age of Mr. Bellerby. So pointedly did he paint his rapid decay, and the lonely state of the heiress of Mossbank ; that she, poor girl, found tear-drops welling from her eyes, and looked beseechingly for forbearance.

The picture he drew in his own mind of Mossbank as it soon would be : the miser gone, screwed down, and sodded over ; the

coffers open, or what was tantamount to it, the key in Mary's girdle ; his own uncertain future, his hand-to-mouth existence, impending judgments, debts outstanding, false position, a stony path, where stilts like his were wont to stumble—to stumble, to fall, to rise no more. 'Twas worth a thought—worth more. Pledged to him she would be both faithful and secret. He might, if need be, cancel all ; he might in safety bide his time, if now he seized the opportunity.

“ Mary, dear Mary !” the words were spoken, his arm was round her waist. The door opened ; always cool, nothing escaped his eye, he had plenty of time to withdraw his hand. Mr. Bellerby, who entered, detected nothing in his unchanging face.

“ Winter,” he said, “ your chaise is at the door. You have only five-and-twenty minutes to catch the train.”

Away went the chaise, and Winter with it ; soon he met the train, and soon was whirled off, miles from Mossbank Cottage.

The father's joy, the daughter's sorrow, were both kept secret ; instinctively they knew their feelings did not accord. His prayers were earnest ; and if they are granted, never again will he see his partner's son. Her's were timid hopes, more than uttered prayers. She knew not how long it might be before she saw again the man she *almost* loved. Uncertain events, how distant are they !

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a third person at Mossbank Cottage, who took no small interest in Mr. Winter's departure. Little Mobbs was a charitable little man, but he was a sharp-sighted little man too. He dreaded Winter as much as he disliked him. When Winter was gone, he chuckled and rubbed his hands, and jumped up and down from his stool with a sensation of relief that he in vain attempted to wear with calmness and dignity. After Taylor came back from Yorkshire, Posthumus was quite eloquent in his denunciation of his master's partner.

“Lor ! Mr. Taylor,” said he, stabbing the compasses into a circle which, for the nonce, he imagined to be Winter’s head, “he is a flinty cove to look at. I had quite a wrong idea of the Evil One till I saw him. It made my blood creep every time the viper came across me. The master don’t love him any more than I do, Mr. Taylor ; and if he hadn’t somehow put a ring through Mr. Bellerby’s nose, he’d have had his walking ticket, without the trouble of asking for it, long enough ago.”

“What hold do you think Winter has on Mr. Bellerby ? Do you suppose it has any reference to the conversation you overheard the day I went away ?”

“Couldn’t say, indeed. You see, Mr. Taylor, after Mr. W. mentioned to Mr. B. that little arrangement for ruining More of Moreton, and swore that he would ruin him, Mr. W. dropped his voice for a minute or so : and, though I could hear a whisper, I heard nothing more, till the

old gentleman said ‘villain!’ and then you see Miss Bellerby came into the office, and as near as a toucher caught me, ‘*flagrante delicto*,’ as we lawyers say.”

“You deserve to have been caught, Posthumus, and punished too. But considering the nature of the conversation, and the discovery you made, it was fortunate you played the eaves-dropper. I hope it may be the providential means of averting this man’s villainy. But tell me, who is this Mr. More of Moreton, Winter proposes so shamefully to ruin? Do you know anything of him?”

“Nothing personally, Taylor. He lives twenty or thirty miles from here. I understand he is a tolerable sort of gentleman. He doesn’t live at Moreton—can’t afford to keep it up. The late Mr. More was a tremendous hand for making nothing of a good deal. He played at ducks and drakes with a very pretty property—very pretty property, indeed, Mr. Taylor; and

that man's ruin made this man's fortune."

"What! Mr. Bellerby's?"

"Late 'Bellerby and Winter.' Yes, Sir, Moreton estate was mortgaged in old Mr. More's time to nearly the full value of the property. I don't believe, Sir, the present owner has a nett income of a thousand per annum."

"But how do you mean that Mr. Bellerby's fortune was made by Mr. More's ruin?"

"Messrs. Bellerby and Winter mortgagees, Sir,—mortgagees. This business not worth much, as you know, Mr. Taylor. Mr. Bellerby, man of independent fortune Sir;—independent fortune—receives the whole interest on the Moreton debt!"

"But Mr. Winter is no longer in the firm; and I don't see how he can effect Mr. More's ruin."

"Leave him alone for that, Mr. Taylor; he's up to a trick or two. There are

more ways than one of ruining a man." And Mobbs looked hard at his companion's shabby coat, and hollow cheek, as if to insinuate that Mr. Taylor was as well aware of the fact as most men.

The look was unnoticed.

"I don't like," said Taylor, "prying into other people's affairs; but I wish I knew more of this matter. Such a villainous scheme should be put a stop to, if possible."

"I don't see how that is exactly your business or mine, Mr. T.," observed Posthumus, who felt an awkward conviction that any exposition must be traced to his eaves-dropping. "'Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost,' is the wisest maxim I know of. I have a great respect for Mr. More of Moreton, but can't afford to lose my bread out of respect to him, or any other gentleman of my acquaintance."

"Whatever you may think about it, Posthumus, I consider it my duty to frustrate

this scheme, if I can. Don't be alarmed on your own account ; what I do, will not compromise you."

Mr. Mobbs mentally imprecated the curiosity and incautiousness of his brother clerk. He fully expected that Taylor's punctiliousness would involve them both in certain ruin. He was, however, aware, that no remonstrances, on his part, would for a moment alter the resolution of the other ; and thought it safest to let the matter sink if possible in oblivion.

It was by no means a common failing of Mobbs's to forget the wrongs of his fellow-creatures : on the contrary he had, perhaps, even more than his share of the milk of human kindness ; but in the present instance he reflected that his own indiscretion had put him in possession of facts which, however much he might commiserate, a certain duty he owed to Mrs. Mobbs and family, imperatively called upon him to overlook. Such a dereliction on Mr. Mobbs's part is doubtless

liable to the censure of the moralist ; but Mobbs, though not habitually weak, was, nevertheless, fallible on some points.

Like the rest of the world, Posthumus found it convenient, now and then, to put on those coloured spectacles, which so alter the aspect of things, that those who wear them are excused, at least by themselves, in following false appearances. His judgment, too, on this occasion, was slightly biassed by one of those ‘*Idola et notiones falsæ*,’ which completely delude the understanding with their subtleties ; making ‘black appear not so very black :’ and in short, giving to some passions—self-interest for example—power to subdue even the strongest love of Justice.

It is a nice point for splitting hairs upon,—that duty to our neighbour, versus duty to that near relative—self once removed—a wife. If it was merely a question between numbers one and two ; number one of course should yield ; but, though man and wife

be one flesh, there is, nevertheless, a line of separation as clear and definable, as the very strongest bond of union ever tied. A man may, for instance, if it amuse him, pull his best tooth out of his own head; but for putting his fingers into his wife's mouth with like intent, has she not a right to bite them? So also he may box his own ears, and deserve it too—a like act to his wife, though possibly permitted by law, is neither customary nor genteel.

Yet, notwithstanding this palpable distinction, the two are one—or should be so. Board or bed, happiness or misery, brats or barrenness, are shared alike, are common property. What business has my wife to be in prison and I in 'fat contentment?' What business has my wife to entertain princes in the drawing-room and keep me locked up in the coal-hole? Our interests are one, or should be so. Am I a king? "the brightest jewel in my crown should be my queen." Am I a beggar?

my queen is a ragged queen ; but she is a queen to me for all that. Man and wife are but two names given to one pair, or should be so. Yes ! there should be a

“ Close, narrow chain, yet soft and kind
As that which spirits above to good does bind—
Gentle and sweet necessity,
Which does not force, but guide, our liberty !”

If it is so—if such be the chain—and we know it is such a one which binds Posthumus to Mrs. Mobbs—what exactly might his duty be, when pity for a stranger was placed in the balance with a loving wife and hungry family tugging at one scale, till it completely over-balanced all other considerations, and made them worth no consideration at all ? Mobbs forsook a duty ; but it was to obey another duty. “ Every man for himself,” was no best of maxims in his mind ; and though, as was perfectly natural, he did tremble lest Taylor’s good intentions should be

visited with the attorney's wrath on his head, yet he secretly hoped that by some accident he might escape, and that Mr. More of Moreton might escape also.

CHAPTER V.

It was toward the close of a sultry day in the month of July. The London season was in the zenith of its utmost bustle and gaiety. Bond Street was thronged with chariots and britzkas. Tall footmen in bright liveries, with gold-headed canes, were opening carriage doors and letting down steps. Lovely creatures, looking as light as their fluttering dresses, were tripping into beautiful shops; and rusty old dowagers were tumbling out after them, with a roll that made the easy carriage swing and pitch like a ship at sea.

Piccadilly resembled the run of an ant's nest. Heavy 'busses, and laden carts, reminded one of the little insects staggering along under eggs twice their own size; cabs and private vehicles—of the busy, restless, unburdened little labourers. Along the pavement, opposite the park, lounged the gentleman, who kindly struts through life for the entertainment of his fellow creatures; who dresses for their admiration, and with wondrous self-denial sacrifices his own peace of mind for the edification of the vulgar.

Gloved and scented—two, apparently belonging to this class, now stood upon the steps of the Coventry. One had just alighted from a well-appointed brougham, the other was coming out of the Club.

“You may go home, Thomas, I shall want the brougham at eight. Well, how are you, my boy?” said the young gentleman of the brougham, holding out two fingers to his friend at the door.

“How are you?” was the reply, “you

look rather seedy. Come and take a stroll in the park, it will do you good," and the two linked arms, and walked in the direction as proposed.

Their conversation was not amusing, and would hardly serve our present purpose of developing their respective characters. Let us suppose we have accompanied them as far as the banks of the Serpentine, and that we already have the following correct information concerning them.

Mr. Arthur Longvale, the youngest of the two (etiquette gives him precedence in description) was the only son of the Honorable Colonel Longvale, and nephew and heir to his wealthy uncle, who bears the noble title attached to that name. In age he was hardly three-and twenty, in appearance handsome and gentlemanlike. His abilities and acquirements were neither above nor below the average. Women liked him because he was unselfish, and danced well. He was popular amongst men of his own standing,

because he was extravagant, and had prospects of a large fortune. His temper was remarkably sweet, his disposition amiable, he was a good sportsman, could drink his bottle without being the worse, and had few faults greater than the harmless one of telling prosy stories. Probably, if Arthur Longvale, the heir to twenty thousand a-year and a title, had been plain Mr. Dash, with the uncertain prospect of pecuniary difficulties to fall back upon; he might have lived in society or lived out of it without society the least appreciating his good qualities, or missing them when lost. As it was, society took considerable notice of all his merits, both positive and negative, and if he was not exactly looked upon as a brilliant ornament to her circles, he at least possessed advantages, which would some day make him a useful one.

His companion was somewhat older, and, though almost as young looking, might be his senior by ten years. He was one of

those men whom to glance at was not to know. If you looked at him twice, you were sure to have two distinct impressions of him. One might be favourable, the other disagreeable; yet could you not say, if asked, which prevailed. A quick observer would have singled him out of a crowd as a character worthy of study; an unobservant person, on the other hand, would have thought him singularly uninteresting. He smiled when he spoke, but his smile never varied the breadth of a muscle. He always laughed at other people's jokes, however bad; but, however good the joke, his laugh was as unvarying as his smile; it lasted exactly the same length of time, it was pitched to the same key, and vibrated to the same degree of loudness. The only feature of his countenance that ever the least changed its expression was his eye: and though his manner, look, and general deportment were calm and self-possessed, the movements of his eyes were quick and restless.

When, unconscious of his presence and talking to another person, you happened to turn round, you would find his piercing glance fixed upon you ; a glance which always created an unpleasant sensation, because instantly withdrawn ; leaving you to infer that this scrutiny had been attended with sinister reflections.

As far as regularity of form is considered, he was good looking ; rather tall than short ; scrupulously neat in his dress, with this peculiarity about it—that he ever wore the same. When any one remarked his predilection for one set of cuts and patterns, he assured them it was less trouble than a change, and that it was decidedly more economical, as nobody knew what was new and what old. As to this last reason people doubted the truth of it. It could hardly be supposed that a man like Gerard Winter, who belonged to all the clubs of the West End ; who invariably had a better “ stepper” in his cab than anybody else ; who had at one time or other broken all

the “hells” in London ; and who paid on the settling day at Tattersall’s as regularly as any man on the turf, would be guilty of economising in such small matters as his tailor’s bill. But now a days it is thought a fashionable thing to talk of economy. The richest people, ladies in particular, tell each other in confidence how hard the times are ; and shrug their shoulders when they ask the price of something they admire, and have already determined to buy ; with an “Ah ! if I could only afford it.”

Young men thought Mr. Winter’s answer little better than humbug ; concluding, as in the case of other fashionables, that—since poverty, joking aside, was a disreputable and ungentlemanly condition—neither Winter nor any one with a distinguished position to maintain, would acknowledge the circumstance, if true. In fact, it is generally taken for granted, when people make a parade of poverty, in the faces of those with whom they are not very intimate, that they mean to

imply that at present they are very well off, but would behave extremely heroically, if they chanced to be in the awkward position they affect. What right any of Winter's friends had to accuse him of asserting an untruth with regard to his wearing apparel we cannot say. No one was sufficiently in his confidence to be aware of the precise amount of his income; though all his acquaintances concluded from his expensive habits that he knew where to go when he wanted money. Whither that was, no one else could tell. He never spoke of his relations. Somehow, through his own unimpeachable respectability, a profound mystery was always preserved on that subject. There were, it is true, some of his old college acquaintances, who went so far as to doubt the fact of his being a gentleman by birth. Indeed it had been rumoured—then this was a long time ago—that he had a near relation of the same name, a petty-fogging attorney in a small town in the north of England.

However well founded these ill-natured remarks might once have been, they had long since been silenced and forgotten, and the subject of them, so far from being prejudiced by suspicion, was now looked upon with respect, and considered by all the rising idlers of the day as the very model and pattern of a "swell."

"Who is that girl, that Pierce More is talking to? Do you know her, Arthur?" asked Winter, as they leant over the rails, at which a crowd of loungers daily collect to stare at the contents of the passing carriages.

"Where?" answered his companion, without troubling himself to turn his head to the right or left.

"In the dark green britzka with two women in it."

"Oh, don't you know her? that's the new beauty, Lady Bellfable's last turn out, Arabella Trammers. By Jove! Pierce seems to be very sweet. What a jolly smile she has, hasn't she, Gerard? I'll bet More is

saying something piquant. Notwithstanding that queer phiz of his, he is a devil of a fellow with women."

"Yes, I dare say he's popular," said Winter, thoughtfully, "but if he had a wall eye as well as an ugly face, he would be just as popular, with two thousand a-year to atone for it."

"He might be with the mothers, but deuce a bit with the young 'uns. Dash it! I wish I had his gift of the gab."

Winter smiled.

"What, then, you think, up to a certain age women are all disinterested angels, but after that time become mercenary old she-dragons? Depend upon it, my boy, you are mistaken; ask More what he thinks. He is always dangling after women, he ought to know something about them."

"Bless your heart, I never met a fellow with such high flown ideas about women as Pierce. In my opinion, he is as just as absurd in thinking them all angels, as you are in think-

ing them all t'other things. I believe it's all my eye, expecting too much of women. I must say I think them deuced jolly in their way. Miss Trammers, now, is a stunner—you can't deny that, Winter."

By this time the carriage had passed on, and the third person, of whom they had spoken, observing that he was beckoned to, crossed the road and joined the two companions.

"How are ye, More?"

"The last favourite wins, Pierce; no outsiders for you—eh, old fellow?"

"Pshaw! Arthur," said the new comer, shaking the last speaker warmly by the hand, and nodding rather stiffly to Winter. "What a suspicious chap you are! You need'nt be afraid; I won't cut you out."

"I'm not so sure of that. Did you ask her if she goes to Lady Bellfable's to-night?"

"She says she most likely will, if she is not too tired after the opera."

"Oh, if she's going to the opera, that'll

do just as well. I've got a box. Let's all dine at the 'Travellers' and go together. Will you come, Winter?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Et vous, Pierce?"

"I don't mind if I do; who'll order dinner?"

"I'll do that," said Longvale.

"No, I'll be hanged if you shall," said More, "I never met a man who understood so little about eating as you. I know exactly what you would give us, cod and oyster sauce, mutton, and a roast chicken."

"Well, what more do you want?"

"What more! my dear fellow, you know nothing about it; I feel a creeping all down my throat when I think of your dinners. Beefsteaks and porter may be very good things, when a man has the stomach of a cannibal, but London vitals must be supported by a creative genius."

"Very well, very well; for my part, I don't care a fig for your *singe au petit vérole*, or

whatever you call your French messes. Have it your own way. Shall we say 7.30? it is half-past six now. We can't dine sooner, but let us be punctual, for I want to hear the beginning."

"Punctual to a minute," said More; "this is my way, so *au revoir*!"

"Punctual to a minute" signified, in other words, any time within three quarters of an hour of the time appointed. Accordingly, about a quarter after eight, so nearly had the three young men calculated their several capacities for patience and punctuality, they were unfolding their snowy napkins, and preparing to pass sentence upon the artistic efforts of the great ——.

"To do you justice, More, the dinner was a good one," said Winter. "Now what, for a guess, should you say they will have the wickedness to charge us?"

"Not more than five-and-twenty shillings a head, I dare say, wine included."

“That depends upon how much we drink,” said Longvale.

“Five-and-twenty shillings a head!” mused Winter. “It strikes me this is rather extravagant. Five-and-twenty shillings when you come to think of it, is a good deal to sink in this way.”

“It is, rather,” answered Longvale; “but don’t moralize, for Heaven’s sake, it gives one such a cursed indigestion. You remind me of a scene that happened to me at Homburg last year.”

“Pass the bottle, More,” said Winter, “Arthur’s long stories are so deuced dry, they want something to wash ’em down.”

“I heard you played pretty high,” said Pierce, “did you win?”

“No; but I am going to tell you. I had been there four or five days, and was beginning to be awfully bored—you know there is nothing to do at Homburg but to play — when one fine morning about two

o'clock, as I was breakfasting in bed, I heard a tremendous row outside my door, and my servant swearing that somebody should not come in, as I was'nt up. Presently the door flew open, and who should appear but an old "buffer" dressed like a parson, in a white choker, the queerest-looking old boy you ever saw."

"Egad, Arthur, you must have taken him for the 'old gentleman' himself. What the dickens did he want?"

"He didn't wait for me to ask him that, but, making a polite bow,

"'You must pardon the liberty I have taken, Mr. Longvale,' said he, 'but my name is Gregory. I should not have ventured to intrude upon you in this uncere- monious way, had I not been a very old friend of your father's.'

"'Not at all,' said I, 'delighted to make your acquaintance, Sir; won't you sit down?' Of course I thought he was going to com-

municate some important news about my family, so I sent my servant away, and he went on.

“‘I should have thought it incumbent upon me (deuced pompous old chap you know), incumbent upon me to make further apologies, Mr. Longvale, but I trust my name will sufficiently vindicate the step I have thought proper to take.’

“‘Not at all, not at all, Sir. Don’t mention it. Have you breakfasted?’ said I, ‘let me ring for another cup.’

“‘I fear,’ said he, ‘the object of my intrusion is of a more important and less agreeable nature.’

“‘Then I wish,’ thought I, ‘that you would go somewhere else, old boy.’

“‘I think it so happened, Mr. Longvale,’ he continued, ‘that we arrived at Homburg the same day; but here, I think, ceased the similarity of our pursuits. My object was to benefit by the waters and recruit my health :

yours, as it appears, by other recreations to impair yours.'

" 'Really, Mr. Gregory, you seem—'

" 'Nay, Sir, have the goodness to listen to me. I saw your name—long familiar to me—in the stranger's book, and although I had not the pleasure of being personally acquainted with you, I was naturally interested whenever I heard that name mentioned. What was my regret at always hearing it coupled with others of a character I blush to think of.' "

" 'Served him right; why didn't he blush for himself,' said Winter.

" 'Upon my word, Mr. What's-your-name, you forget Sir—'

" 'The object of this visit? not for a moment, Sir, and disagreeable as is the task I have imposed upon myself, I do not shrink from it. To be explicit, Mr. Longvale, I have learnt that you spend the whole of your time here in the gambling-houses?'

“ ‘ And if I do, Sir, what’s that to you ? ’ ”

“ Aye, what was that to him ? ” said Winter.

“ ‘ A great deal to me, and much more to you, Mr. Longvale, I know nothing of your present means, but I know you are the heir to a large fortune. ’ ”

“ ‘ And hav’nt I a right to spend it as I think proper ? ’ ”

“ To be sure you have,” said Winter, “ and you had better pay the bill, and let us toddle.”

“ ‘ Neither you, Sir, nor any man living ; ’ says the old chap. ‘ Legally, you have the disposition of your wealth at your command, but morally speaking you are amenable to higher laws than those framed by man. ’ ”

“ Bosh ! ” interrupted Winter.

“ ‘ Wealth in the hands of a wise man is a blessing, in the hands of the fool a curse. Did you ever reflect, Mr. Longvale, that as the heir to a large fortune, you have a responsibility to answer for which does not fall to the

lot of one in ten thousand. If not, I rejoice to have been the first to remind you of it. Be not deluded with the false notion that you have a reputation to establish as a young man of fashion; and take the word of an old man, that the vice you are indulging in is one of the hardest to relinquish, that its fierce excitement will make all true pleasure tame, and that, in the end, it will leave you nothing but remorse for a passion which you know yourself to be guilty of, but cannot shake off.' "

"Why the deuce didn't you get up and shake him off?" said Winter, yawning, "his prosiness would certainly have made me do that, or else have sent me to sleep; but come, we've finished the bottle, let's order a cab, and be off."

"There's no hurry," said More, "what else did he say?"

Winter yawned. Longvale, whose dignity and prosiness had increased with each glass of wine, said:

“ You see, Pierce, I didn’t know how to answer him. It might be all devilish true what the old boy said: and he was a mildish old man, so I didn’t like to tell him he was an ass.”

“ But what else did he say ?” inquired More.

“ I can’t remember exactly what he said. I know he preached one of the longest sermons I ever heard, and made out that gambling, and good dinners, and all that sort of fun were quite a mistake; he declared they made people unhappy, and talked about young men with my education and advantages having higher aims in life than mere amusement; and said if one could not do good in any other way, one ought to improve oneself, and set a good example, and all that sort of humbug, and of course hammered away about having too much money. I believe he was a regular old socialist, for he wound up with some quotation about ‘ the pampered

creature of society, who has more than enough thieving from his brother.' ”

“ Ha, ha !” laughed Winter, “ they won't take me up for stealing then ; I don't think I have money to pay the bill.”

“ All right,” said Longvale. “ Put it down to me, waiter, and fetch a cab.”

“ Did you ever see your friend again ?” inquired More.

“ Thank goodness ! no. I never was so much bored in my life.”

“ I should think not,” said Winter, “ if he was as prosy as you were Arthur.”

“ I wish I knew him :” thought More. And so by accident the old gentleman's homily had found a listener.

Pierce More was a lover of music : and the opera they went to hear, happened to be one of his favourite pieces. His brain was heated with wine ; and this made him so deaf that he could only hear the swelling fortés of a

powerful chorus, and the loud crashes of the orchestra over which their box was placed. The music was more intoxicating than the wine; he leant back into the shade, and head and heart throbbed as if they would burst. A tumult of thought and passion rushed into his mind. Not the wine alone, nor the music alone could have wrought him to such a pitch, but perhaps the two together did it. Perhaps, a fit of indigestion, perhaps, what thoughtless people call accident. There is no telling how it was. Simply, we know that certain temperaments are and ever will be strangely stirred sometimes. His was so now. He had heard this particular opera many years ago: since then he had had much rough acquaintance with the world. He had witnessed startling scenes, and had experienced much in thought and deed. These scenes, these experiences now moved before him as a melodrama, with grand orchestral accompaniment. Through the din and confusion, Arthur Longvale's prosy anecdote recurred to him constantly like a nightmare.

Ideas come from no one knows where, they creep in, are turned over, admitted, fostered and adopted for ever. Ideas akin to the sentiments of Longvale's Homburg friend had hovered about the portals of More's mind for some days past; and now, apparently by chance—for thus chance *systematically* operates—these same ideas were brought to a working focus. Was there, then, any similarity between him and that common-place being, Arthur Longvale? Alas! he was compelled to admit there was. Mr. Gregory's advice was applicable to a whole class. Of that class he was as much a member as either of his friends then present.

The reflection was not agreeable—reflections seldom are when turned inwards; but, thought Mr. More, if this advice *does* concern me, at least I will not be as insensible to it as these thoughtless men. It was galling to a mind like his to make comparisons between himself and those whom he considered his inferiors—he was not used to

it, and beginnings are hard ; chance, systematic chance, however, forced him. Was he not a gambler worse than Longvale—worse because he actually played more and ought to have known better ? He had tried to give it up but found that impossible ; how despicable to be thus defeated ! how humiliating ! Why did he go on with it ? For the love of excitement ? yes, excitement was delicious, the fiercer the better ; but the reaction—how was that ? Painful. Was it possible that self-indulgence, when gratified as he had the power of gratifying it, could fail to produce happiness ? He had tried it, and seemingly it had totally failed. Not only had it failed, but it had produced exactly a contrary result. Head-aches, heart-burnings, discontent, a want, and a blank, were all it produced. Did the old man talk of higher aims than self-indulgence, of noble gifts perverted, of wasted time, of energies unused, of sloth, of ignorance, of pride, of means to do good without the will to execute, of high

responsibility, of self-improvement? Not new to him these thoughts. But here they were to-night, arrayed in spectral forms before him.

The opera was "La Favorita." The third act had just begun; the echoes of the last chorus were fading on his senses, and the soft notes of an organ, followed by the plaintive chant of the choir, stole upon him. The rich harmony, the religious character of the music, the wonderful illusion of the ruined Gothic pile, in all the mysticism of its midnight shade; the cowed monks, with lantern and shovel moving solemnly along aisle and cloister, to bury their dead; the imposing silence of the audience—together worked powerfully on his heated imagination; regrets for the past gave place to brighter hopes for the future. He forgot where he was, and a tear stole down his cheeks.

"I say, Arthur," said Winter, nudging his companion, "look at More; he is distil-

ling red wine into white; poor devil! he's crying drunk."

More overheard the remark. With a sudden effort at self-command he turned to Longvale and asked him if he had found out where Miss Trammers was.

"Yes, to be sure; she is in the box above us; I have just been paying my respects. She made all sorts of tender inquiries after you."

"Come along, More," said Winter; "let's go and see her. I want to be introduced."

"I can't introduce you here; if we meet at Lady Bellfable's I shall be most happy."

The opera ended, the trio did not wait for the ballet, but drove straight to the ball in Curzon Street.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRING of carriages extended nearly the whole length of the street. Inch by inch they moved on by little jerks, and depositing their gay burdens, the coachmen drove off with a rattle to regale themselves at the nearest public-house. Although the night was hot and close, the rain descended in torrents, and none of the thin-booted gentlemen inside the cab were in so desperate a hurry to arrive at their destination, as to prefer walking through two or three hundred yards of slop, to being set down at the door with

dry feet, and locks underanged by the cruel necessity of putting on their hats. More looked out to see how long they would probably have to wait ; they were getting on slowly ; each lady had to be handed out with an umbrella over her head. He could hear the music distinctly, and observed a policeman clearing the pavement on the opposite side of the street of a few ragged boys, who were staring at the open window of the ball-room. As he threw himself back in the cab he smiled at an old recollection which framed itself into the following half coherent form.

“Strange !” he mused, “this recollection which comes across me is almost like one of those sudden fits of prevision, when the mind forestalls each thought and circumstance before it happens. How long since is it ? It seems ages ago ; yet it cannot be more than ten years at the outside. I remember being led by the sound of a band, in one of my evening rambles,

to a house somewhere in this very neighbourhood. A mob had collected about the doors ; numbers of carriages were driving up, and numbers of very smartly dressed people were being set down. There was a ball up-stairs. I was standing with a little knot of shabby fellows, perhaps idlers like myself, who, maybe, took more pleasure in listening to the merry music than in thinking of the fantastic groups who entered to caper to its measures. Presently I started from a rude push on the shoulders, and received, in a harsh voice, an order to move on. I looked at the policeman for a minute but the badge of authority left me no appeal ---I was herded with the herd.

“ For a few moments I paused to take a glance through the open windows—at those select merry-makers, whom it was the policeman’s duty to guard from our contamination, and of whose music we were not allowed to taste the notes which fell from the open windows. What a mingling mass of ‘ black spirits and white,

red spirits and grey !' coats of all colours, muslin gowns, glittering jewels, and ostrich feathers—all twirling round, and sliding, and bobbing, and smiling, and looking happy. How happy they all seemed ! Little they troubled their heads about anything outside those walls. Little did they care for us poor devils in the streets who had no right—not the smallest in the world to listen to *their* merriment. So, at least, thought I. Dance away, twist and twirl and bob and slide away—every dog has his day ! you, perhaps, are not happy though you look so. The object of this life is not dancing, and this world was not made for you alone—though polkas, perhaps, may be. Dance away, you will be tired enough by-and-bye, and you are hot enough now, and you will all look like custards and cheesecakes in the morning !

“So, at least, thought I, and so might have thought Mutton-face, the butcher’s boy, at my side. And so we might all have thought

—we of the mob outside—but we all had to move on, nevertheless, and silently and sulkily we did it too.

“When I got home I was more sulky than ever, and I had no body to tell how sulky I was, and so I cried. And why did I cry? Was it because I thought myself one of an ill-used set, and that I sympathized for that set as a portion of a class who, if they attempted to share the pleasures of the rich, might always be subject to the same rough treatment as I had just experienced? Was it that I felt for them a sympathy which the class I belonged to withheld from them? Was it that I reflected that these midnight revellers were capering at the expense of these other midnight labourers? Not so—no, it was quite different to this; I was not brought up with such notions; I was reared the stiff backed child of luxury and pride. To look up, not to look down, had been my teaching.

“Much as I hated the dancers, I had still

less affection for the mobbers. I would sooner have had fifty crowds swept on by rude authorities, than that the set to which I belonged should have lost the sacred privilege of listening exclusively to their *own* polkas. Then why did I cry? Foolish boy! I would not have confessed it then, though I laugh at it now. I cried for no better reason than because I was not man enough to go to balls, and because I was lame, and should not be able to dance as others danced, when I did go. Another galling reason was, that I, who had been turned away like one of the mob, was every bit as proud as the proudest of them in the ball-room. Oh! some day (I remember thinking), when I grow older and bigger, I will go to all their balls; and if I can't dance—I'll dress as well as they, and be as conceited as they are; my time will come to be taken care of by the policemen and have the crowd turned out of my way, lest they should damp my merriment with their sordid looks. Ten years ago! yes, ten years

work great changes, when the necessity of thinking and acting for ourselves breaks the chains of prejudices wound about us by education."

"Take care, Sir," said a policeman, as he opened the cab door, and offered More his arm, "it is very slippery, Sir."

More thought of the ragged boys on the opposite side of the street, and, preceded by a groom of the chambers, walked up-stairs.

He made his bow to Lady Bellfable, but passed on into the crowd; knowing that anything beyond a passing remark would be lost upon her ladyship in the hurry of receiving her guests. The room was densely crowded; and not seeing any one close to him whom he cared to more than recognize, he took his stand in the balcony; and while he watched the throng, unconsciously pursued the thread of his meditations in the cab.

"And so this scene, which ten years ago it was one of the objects of my highest

ambition to play a part in, is now as familiar to me as my commonest habit; and instead of being an excitement and a pleasure, it has become a necessary part of my existence. Yes, I have changed; but they have not changed—this crowd—the same ingredients make the same mixture. As many men and women as are in this large room, so many distinct and unlike characters are there; so many strange episodes in human nature's history; full of joys and sorrows, of love and hatred, of jealousies and friendships, of confidence and distrust, of selfishness, of wisdom, of folly, of all kinds of good, of all kinds of evil. How separate and dissimilar! and yet how similar in some things! Their petty ambitions, their mode of life, their good opinion of themselves, their general heartlessness! And the end of all is pleasure! Pleasure? See how they elbow each other about, how civil they look, and how uncivil they feel, when they tread on each other's

toes, or admire something better than their own ! Some hasty and pushing and out of temper because they cannot get by, others shy and retiring, also out of temper, because they are pushed. Some whom everybody knows and speaks to, others whom nobody takes the smallest notice of. The only ones that look really happy are the young and pretty ; and they perchance would not be happy could they read the thoughts of those who are not young nor pretty ; if they could see the wrinkled hearts beneath the wrinkled skins, which grow more wrinkled as they look upon the smoothness of their youngers.

“ And must I too grow old ? Clearly. But not to be, and think like one of these ? Yet in what should I differ ? But all those bright visions that dance in the radaint garden of the future—fond companions of my happiest moments — kind, cheering friends of hopes, it matters not how wild—dissipators of despondent melancholy—gallant champions

of love and honour, before whom all that is base must flee—will they forsake me? Sooner than be without them—

“How d’ye do, Miss Trammers?”

“Oh, Mr. More, I am so glad to see you. Mamma was afraid you would not get her invitation in time. It is, I fear rather a stupid ball. Who are you talking to in the balcony? agreeable, I hope?”

“The most agreeable person of my acquaintance, at least, to me, Miss Trammers.”

“Indeed, do tell me her name,” and the young lady tried to look indifferent.

“I didn’t say anything about *her*—I was talking to myself.”

“Now really, Mr. More, you get worse and worse. What were you thinking of, that made you seek the retirement of the balcony?”

“Nothing particular. I only went there to get out of the crush: I hate to be squeezed to death as if one was a lemon.”

“And to be made as sour as one by the process—eh?”

“Do you mean to be personal?”

“You take me up as if you thought I did.”

“You do say sharp things sometimes; but beauties will be beauties.”

“Do *you* mean to be personal, Mr. More?”

“Yes, of course I do; you knew that.”

“Not I; I did not think you were such a humbug; and then, you know I am not vain—now am I?” with the sweetest smile.

“I should hardly accuse you of vanity, if you did happen to be proud of your looks.”

“Upon my word, you should have lived at the court of Louis Quatorze, Mr. More; your compliments are thrown away in this matter-of-fact age.”

“Nay, I was merely stating matters-of-fact.”

“Have you been dancing to-night?”

“You know I can only dance quadrilles, and this I never do unless I find an agreeable partner.”

“I should think you would have no diffi-

culty if you look round. See, there's Lady Emily Linthorne without a partner; she is clever; and so pretty! Why don't you ask her?"

"Because she is 'so pretty' and gives herself airs. If I asked her to dance, she would say, 'I shall be delighted; but let me see—I'm engaged for three polkas, two quadrilles, and four waltzes—but I shall be very happy to dance with you.' Then I should say: 'It seems you mean me to get rid of some of your partners; which shall I insult, and shoot on the spot?' Then she would answer, 'Oh, any or all if you please; I always make a hash of all my partners.' Then I: 'Pray make a hash of me, as long as we manage it somehow. Since you have given me hope, I shall never despair;' and away I should go, disgusted with her perfidy and conceit."

"Well, there's Miss Halcyon; what do you think of her? She's thought very handsome."

“Not by me. She *would* be a beauty but doubts whether she is one. If I were to ask her, she would be less gracious than a real beauty in pretending the favour she granted was a greater one ; she would look grand and say : ‘I am afraid, Mr. More, I am engaged ; but really I am engaged for so many dances, that I can’t remember about this next.’ I should, of course, say, ‘I knew beforehand it was hopeless to ask,’ and leave her disgusted at her own refusal and at my indifference. But see, here’s Lord Pumpton coming to ask you. Do you want him ?”

“Not the least ; but unless you—”

“Well, then, may I have the honour ?”

“With great pleasure.” A sweet smile.

“Is Miss Trammers engaged for this quadrille ?” said Lord Pumpton.

“Yes, I am sorry to say.” And Miss Trammers looked the picture of regret.

“Poor fellow !” said More, “he’ll think that look was genuine.”

“Let him,” said the beauty, laughing.

“What a shame ! but that’s the way all—”

“All what ? how ungrateful you are !”

“Not ungrateful ; I fully appreciate your kindness to me ; but at the same time have not the least doubt you will treat me the same whenever it suits your convenience.”

“What shocking opinions you have of people. Did I ever treat you in that way ?” with a look of tenderness.

“I don’t know that I ever gave you a chance. But why did you send Pumpton away ? I thought he was a great friend of yours ; he’s always extremely attentive.” More said this with a dash of sarcasm in his tone, as if he expected it to produce a positive effect of some kind.

“Why ?” repeated the beauty, with a charmingly confidential look, rendered more charming by a slight embarrassment of manner, “why ? because Lord Pumpton is a bore. He makes himself so ridiculous—he plagues one to death by the most tedious stuff about the heat of the room, and

the opera, and racing; and says everything in short, that every other man has said fifty times over before he comes. I can't bear those sort of people. I like to be amused—in fact, I like—” with a careless, and, of course unintentional look up at More's face—“ I like agreeable people.”

More felt a painful conviction that, as novelists term it, “ the eloquent blood was mantling in his cheeks.” He was always satisfied in his own mind, that Pumpton was a person of very small consequence, and only wondered how he could ever have instituted a comparison between them so derogatory to himself.

“ And so you like agreeable people ?” said More, feeling his importance augmented by the last remark to the rate of about fifty Pumptons per cent. “ Yet, as a general rule, agreeable people are seldom popular. Others are envious of talents they themselves do not possess. And besides this, people have a suspicion that agreeable

talkers are insincere; they try to please everybody indiscriminately, and must constantly dissemble."

"Yes, I fear that honesty and stupidity are but too often convertible terms; but I hope there are exceptions." Miss Trammers spoke feelingly.

"I hope so too; it were a shame if wit and falseness were equally synonymous."

"Yet, strange enough, the world prizes cleverness more than honesty."

"The world *we* live in does," said More, "but simply because it *fears* the one quality and *despises* the other."

"You seem to have a very exalted opinion of the world, Mr. More."

"I sincerely wish some one," with an emphasis on the some one, "would convince me of my error."

"It will be your own fault if you are not convinced of that;" said Miss Trammers in a low tone of voice.

The quadrille was ended: and as numerous

applicants approached to ask for the honour of his partner's hand, Pierce found that those inconvenient lets called *appearances* compelled him much against his inclination to resign his enviable post, and to retire. The look bestowed on one side, and returned on the other, did not very clearly indicate that either of them was much delighted with the sacrifice they were obliged to make; and when More met Winter in the supper-room, after having undergone the purgatorial inflictions of the crush up-stairs, he was not so elated with an excess of good spirits, but that he readily acceded to Winter's proposal of finishing a bottle of iced champagne deposited by that gentleman behind an unobtrusive, raised pie at one end of the supper tables.

"Well, old boy," and the speaker filled a good-sized tumbler, and handed it to his friend, "you seemed to be getting on swimmingly. What a nice-looking girl she is, I wish you'd introduce me."

"I don't think I shall go up any more,"

said the other, replacing his empty glass on the table. "No more wine for me."

"Nonsense; there's nothing like it in these melting moments; what are you going to do to-night, old fellow? How well this wine is iced! The second glass is better than the first. If you won't introduce me to Miss Trammers, I shall go and shake my elbow for half-an-hour in Bonnet Street. What say you? let us light our 'baccoes, and walk down."

"No, I'll be hanged if I do; I shan't go there again. I am going to give up playing."

"Ha, ha, I like that, by Jove! If I had your luck I'd break every bank in London."

"Luck! my dear fellow, I tell you I have had the d——dest run of ill-luck this last month that ever man had. I tell you in confidence, Winter, my purse won't stand it: I am fairly cleaned out, and owe lots of money into the bargain."

"Nonsense, have another shy; here's Pumpton. I'll pound it he's going there. I say, Pumpton, are you going to Vieux-champs?"

"Yes, will you come?"

"I want to come, but here's More says he won't go."

"What's the matter, has he got the pip?" inquired his lordship, as he buttoned up his great coat.

"No, but the sinner has turned saint in his youth."

"D—d nonsense," interposed his lordship, "come on More, I'll lend you a 'fiver' to start with."

"Thank you, I daresay I have got as much as that myself." And piqued with the two last insinuations upon his morals and his poverty, Pierce More accepted the proffered arm of Lord Pumpton, and the three walked on till they reached the steps of No. 70, Bonnet Street, St. James's.

While the young nobleman communicated

all the impatience of his noble birth to the brass knocker on the door: the second tumbler of Lady Bellfable's champagne caused the area bell to vibrate with unusual fury down stairs. Nothing could have been more supererogatory than these frantic exertions for admittance. A single tap with the knuckle of the forefinger would have had all the magical effect upon the gates of this robber's den, that the "open Sesame" had upon those of the more respectable thieves of yore. The bolts of an eccentric Chubb lock retired with a slippy and noiseless jerk to the mysterious recesses of their own vitals, a sombre-looking man with a white neckcloth opened the street door, admitted the three gentlemen, and instantly turned the Chubb inside out with a grim signifying defiance to the whole constabulary force of the metropolis. Another cat-like face and white neckcloth appeared at a small wicket in a very large door, from behind which, judging from its iron bound aspect, the cat-faced individual at the

wicket could with perfect safety to himself civilly admit, or uncivilly reject any number of visitors whose personal appearances might or might not meet with his approbation.

“Come, don’t be all night!”

“All right, my lord,” said the two sombre gentlemen, as the second barrier to the entrance retired on its hinges, “I hope you’ll have good luck, Mr. More.”

The three ascended the staircase, taking two steps at a time, and were met on the landing by the polite and accomplished master of the establishment, who bowed them through the supper-room into the inner sanctum, with expressions of hospitality which showed how cordially they were welcome. A couple of young guardsmen, and a florid-faced man with a profusion of diamond rings and a bald head, were sitting at the hazard table; two croupiers were attending to the game; and a third individual, whose business appeared to consist in handing lights for cigars, and fetching brandies and sodas, stood in the

background. This last only occasionally interfered with the table, whenever a bad throw for the 'caster called forth a volley of vituperative accusations against the croupiers in general, and the dice in particular. Upon such occasions he would step up and with a sublime look of offended innocence, cause one die to spin upon the face of the other in so beautiful and satisfactory a manner, as to convince the players by this proof of its perfect balance, that it could not possibly be loaded.

"Take a seat, gentlemen," said the croupier. "Seven's the main—eleven's the nick."

"Is that the first throw?" asked More.

"Yes, Sir, that gentleman's in great luck to-night."

"Ten white chips on the 'In,' and five pound on the 'hand!'"

"Stop, Sir, I didn't hear the 'main' called."

"Seven again," said the caster.

"Five to seven. Make your betting,

gentlemen. Stop a minute, Sir. Five to seven. Now, Sir !”

A five was thrown : and More, having no money, wrote a check for twenty pounds. We will spare the reader the particulars of a game which it is most devoutly to be hoped he is utterly ignorant of. The result of an hour’s play was that More had signed checks to the amount of several hundred pounds ; that Winter had been also a small loser ; that all the party had imbibed a large quantity of spirituous liquors, and that the supper was on the table in the next room.

More sat with his back to the fire, and next to the florid-faced man with the bald head. The florid-faced man—if so uncharitable an inference might be deduced from the extreme irritability of every feature in his countenance ; or from the violent manner in which he crushed the legs and wings of a snipe between a ponderous pair of jaws that knocked down one of his shirt collars at the very onset ; or from the peppery tone in

which he requested his neighbour to give him the salt—appeared to bear his share of the general loss with much less than his share of the general stoicism.

His temper had not been improved by an accident of which More was the innocent cause. While conveying to his lips a very full glass of port wine, More's elbow had the misfortune to come in contact with his arm; and by far the larger portion of the ruby-coloured fluid was precipitated down his throat, but between his white neckcloth and the outside of that passage; thus, by one act disappointing his stomach, destroying his linen, and adding caloric to his temper.

Lord Pumpton, who had finished his supper, and was warming his back at the fire, with difficulty suppressed a very strong inclination to laugh: at the same time, however, he encouraged an equally strong inclination to keep the ire of the florid-faced man up to the boiling mark. He had been amusing himself before this little di-

version by crumbling a piece of bread and throwing the crumbs into the fire. An irresistible impulse seized him at this critical moment to drop a few of these crumbs upon the shining and hairless pate in front of him. The first experiment was executed with the utmost caution. More was the only person who observed it. The florid-faced man merely intimated that he was aware of a tickling sensation on that part of his person by passing his hand two or three times over the smooth surface from which the crumbs had rolled clean away.

Lord Pumpton was about to repeat the operation, when More, who had risen in the meantime, caught his hand and detained it in the act. At that instant, the victim of the joke happened to raise his eyes to a looking-glass in front, wherein he distinctly saw the attitudes of the two figures behind him. With that rapid action of the mind by which it sometimes comprehends at a glance the connexion of cause and effect, he saw at once the present

intention, he recollected the tickling sensation that had not yet subsided. He determined in his own mind which was the aggressor, and which was the defender ; he resolved upon one step to be taken. Taking that one step, he changed his position with a celerity of motion that would have done credit to a semaphore, and planted a very powerful fist upon the bridge of More's nose. The collision of the first impellent was communicated through the first body at rest to the second, against which that body was impelled. In less scientific terms, More's head was driven like a battering ram into the pit of Lord Pumpton's stomach. And that gentleman's head in turn was driven against the looking-glass with a velocity that produced a star of the first magnitude in the piece of furniture, and a variety of small constellations within his lordship's pericranium.

On recovering the first shock, a natural disposition to combativeness suggested to More the propriety of resenting the injury in a

mode similar to that in which it had been committed. But as certain apprehensions with regard to their own safety operated upon the minds of the bystanders, they rushed to the rescue, intent upon the prohibition of further bloodshed ; and—while More with his bloody nose was staggering and struggling in the arms of his peacemaking friend, Mr. Winter—Monsieur Vieuxchamps and the three croupiers appropriated to their several custodies the legs, arms, and body of the infuriated gentleman of the bald head.

“Vieuxchamps !” screamed he of the florid face, “get off, —— you ; if the —— wants to fight me, I’ll give him my card.”

“*Your* card,” shouted the other belligerent, “you ——, bald-headed, drunken old cheesemonger, do you think I would condescend to shoot such an in—— snob as you. If I get at you I’ll pummel your whole body till it is as blue as your nose.”

“Be quiet, for God’s sake, More,” said Winter, in a pacifying tone of voice. “We

shall have the police breaking in presently."

"Oh, let the blackguard alone," said Lord Pumpton, just descending from the clouds of insensibility, and arranging his hair in the shattered looking-glass, with no evident intention of pursuing the conflict. "He knows very well that if you had a mind, you could grease his head and swallow him whole. But the best way is to let him alone. Come, let us be off!"

"The cowardly ——'s!" growled the bald headed man, hoarse with rage, and coupling the above adjective with a very choice epithet. "They are going to sneak off; but I shall catch some of you one of these days. Let me go, Vieuxchamps, or I'll break your head next."

But Monsieur Vieuxchamps, as if to provide against so pleasing a contingency only kept the tighter hold; and, observing to his croupiers with profound wisdom and foresight, that so long as the gentlemen were

left together, they would call each other all the blackguards they could think of, he with some persuasion and more pulling, removed his charge to the adjoining room.

More, who had been effectually sobered from his first state of excitement, was now gradually calming down from his second ; and as the object of his animadversion was removed, he began to see how ridiculous and contemptible it would be to recommence a round of fisty-cuffing with a vulgar and low bred ruffian, whom he had been brought into contact with, only by his own folly and indiscretion. It required little persuasion, therefore, to get him out of the house ; and this accomplished, tranquillity was once more restored.

The gas lamps were already beginning to look dim through the first grey hues of day-break. More had left his companions and was walking slowly towards his chambers in the Albany ; a confused review of the afternoon's events, amongst which the scene in

the gambling-house was most prominent, was passing through his mind. He was about to cross Piccadilly when he was accosted by a man whose sordid rags and haggard cheeks betrayed the signs of unfeigned want and misery. He seldom refused a beggar when he had any small change about him, but he was in no humour to stop and unbutton his coats, and search for a sixpence in pockets which had just been so completely emptied. He hardly looked at the man who begged of him, indeed he purposely inclined his head in a contrary direction; and increasing his speed of walking endeavoured to release himself from the presence of misery which his conscience hinted to him it would have been more creditable to relieve. The beggar still followed.

“What do you want?” said More. “Go away; I have nothing to give you.”

“For the love of God, Sir, help me if you have it in your power.”

There was something in the tone of the

speaker's voice—something too in the manner of expressing himself—which made More turn and look at him.

“Yes, Sir,” said the man, as if interpreting the meaning of the investigation; “I am not what I look; at least I was not always so. If you have a Christian heart listen to me.”

“Of course you fellows always have a story to tell. The half of you beggars were in better circumstances once; it's a regular dodge. I tell you I have nothing to give you.”

The last of these sentences was uttered in an accent which a less practised ear than that of the suppliant's might have easily translated into a readiness to give, if the speaker had had it in his power at that moment to do so. The beggar saw the impression he had made, and entreated if the gentleman had nothing to give, he would at least listen to his story. Pierce, whose heart was made of anything but stone—butter would be a more applicable

illustration of its natural obduracy—had no ready excuse at hand, he therefore slackened his pace, and, lighting his cigar, ended by sitting on a door-step, while the beggar narrated the following tale.

CHAPTER VII.

“I AM the youngest son of a large family. My father was a clergyman, and an excellent scholar. At his hands I received an education that might have fitted me for a distinguished university career. But I had no sooner entered at —— College, than I became intimately acquainted with a young man of fashion, who introduced me to his numerous friends; at that time the most dissipated set in the whole university. They were mostly young men with either rank or prospects far above my own. They were all well

off, but all extravagant beyond their means. They rode steeple chases, kept hunters, gambled high, were excellent billiard players, and were particularly proud of being seen in the betting ring at Newmarket. Upon every occasion they acted in open defiance of general decorum and of the university regulations; and although such a breach of discipline would have been visited with the severest marks of displeasure upon undergraduates of humbler pretensions—the tutors, so far from remonstrating or exposing their misdeeds, seemed rather to court and play the sycophant in proportion to the flagrancy of their conduct.

“Living exclusively, as I did, with such a set, I found it impossible to escape from the vortex of their debaucheries. Emancipated from the guardianship of a rigidly virtuous home, I entered with zest into their habits of excess. I had no money to pay my bills; but the company I kept was, I suppose, a sufficient voucher to the tradesmen for my respectability; and naturally of

a proud disposition, there was no extravagance they committed which I did not feel bound to imitate, or exceed.

“At the end of two years, most of my companions having the privilege as members of noble families to graduate in that time, I was left to prepare myself for the final examination. All I had learned from my father’s tuition had been forgotten in riot and dissipation. I foresaw that to enter for my degree could only be attended with disgrace. The importunity of my creditors by no means dispelled the qualms of conscience which now tormented me. I knew that the disappointment of my family, and especially of my father, would be a serious blow for me to inflict. I had no alternative but one. My father’s elder brother had inherited the bulk of the family property. He had one daughter, and I was his favourite nephew. At the beginning of the long vacation, before going home, I took my place in the coach for the nearest town

to his country-seat, and presented myself at his house with the bold resolution to make a full confession of the baseness of my past conduct.

“ He received me with cordiality, and, to my utmost concern and dismay, congratulated me on my industrious behaviour at the university; expressing his hearty wishes that I should verify the assurances my father had given him of my ultimate success at the examination. His utter ignorance of my real condition rendered it almost impossible for me to make the disclosure; and I know not how I should have mustered sufficient courage to wound his feelings, if the kind intervention and womanly tact of my cousin had not then assisted me. To her I had, on my arrival, communicated the real object of my visit. She entered into the embarrassing nature of my situation with the most tender sympathy. We devised a thousand schemes for breaking the intelligence to her father, but rejected all when

we came to the conclusion that she alone, by awaiting her opportunity, could relieve me from the scrape, and ensure his forgiveness.

“Even with strangers, my cousin Louisa had the most fascinating and persuasive manner. Her father doted on her; she was his only child. It is not then to be wondered at, that she had little difficulty in appeasing his anger, and obtaining his promise to assist me. He reprimanded me severely, yet not unkindly; but added that, although it was easy to overlook my extravagance, he was less ready to pardon my deceit when there had been so little occasion for it. He desired to have all my bills sent to him, and, receiving from me my word of honor that I would not gamble in future, dismissed me to my father, with injunctions to tell him everything except the amount of my debts, which he (my uncle) had promised to pay for me.

“I had been at home some months; the first disappointment at my failure had

subsided ; I was beginning to be weary of inactivity, and longed for the excitement of travelling, or a profession. My father's numerous family made him also anxious that I should now begin to provide for myself ; and, as he felt he could never trust too implicitly in the kindness of his brother, I was sent to my uncle to ask his wishes and advice on the subject of my future prospects. As usual, he received me with open arms : and, informing me that he could not then decide what course I had better adopt, insisted on my making his house my home, until he had chosen me a profession.

“ My uncle's wife had not been dead many years. Of all the women I ever knew, she approached the nearest to perfection. Since her death, my uncle had lived a life of perfect retirement. He devoted his whole being to the happiness and education of his daughter. With that daughter, and in the house of that recluse, I passed six months of perfect

enjoyment. At the end of that time, I loved Louisa, and Louisa loved me. My uncle was not blind to the state of our feelings towards one another. Nor did he cast any obstacles in the way of our increasing intimacy. But he was aware of the dangers of a too early marriage, and, knowing the importance it was to his daughter's future welfare, that I should undergo some experience before I involved both her and myself in an irretrievable step, procured me a commission in a cavalry regiment in India, which I was compelled to join without delay.

“It was not till the last moment before my departure, that I declared to Louisa how passionately I loved her. She encouraged me to hope for glory and distinction. She promised to write by every mail. We exchanged vows of eternal constancy, and I tore myself away from my happy home.

“I was about three years in India. I had distinguished myself in several of the severest

campaigns and, by the greatest good fortune escaping the fate of many of my brother officers, had succeeded to their rank by the most rapid promotion. All this time I had been constantly receiving the happiest assurances of Louisa's unchanged attachment; and when at the end of three years I obtained six month's leave of absence, it was as the accepted lover of my cousin that I was welcomed to her father's house.

“My uncle now saw how much his daughter's happiness depended upon our immediate union. My conduct during the three years of my absence had re-established me in his good opinion. He had but one objection to give his consent. That one was the parting with his only child. But, in his unselfish consideration, his own happiness was not long permitted to interfere with ours. Before he was aware that it had been our mutual intention not to rob him of this one consolation, he joined our hands and, giving us his pious blessing, was in his own estimation amply rewarded for the

sacrifice he made, by the contemplation of our complete happiness.

“I will not attempt to describe the enjoyment of a state, I had unceasingly looked forward to for nearly four years. The beauty of my wife was, comparatively speaking, a trifling charm when compared with the tender and affectionate nature of her disposition. Each day I learned to love her more and more. Each day, in my eyes, she grew more beautiful, more fascinating. Our love was insatiable. We lived only for each other.

“One only thought marred this delicious dream, it was the prospect of our quickly approaching separation. My leave of absence had nearly expired, and notwithstanding the regiment to which I belonged, had but one more year in India, in order to complete the fixed period of its foreign service, I felt as if this year was a lifetime that would separate me for ever from the object of my devotion.

“I should not here forget to mention that before my marriage, on my homeward passage,

I had fallen in with my old college friend, who had been travelling for his amusement in the East. Our intimacy was renewed with all the warmth of early friendship. He congratulated me sincerely on my success as a soldier, and heartily wished me joy of the happy prospects before me. He expressed a natural curiosity to see the woman I was for ever describing to him with all the enthusiasm of a romantic lover; and promised in answer to an invitation I gave him, to pay me a visit as soon as I was settled in my new condition as a husband.

“It was on the eve of my departure that I heard he was visiting at a country house in the neighbourhood. I immediately wrote to ask him to come and see me. He accepted the invitation, and remained with us till the day I sailed. His easy and courteous manner, his frank and manly appearance, and his long standing friendship for me, soon won him the regard and affection of my wife and uncle; and amidst the sorrow of my leave-

taking it was a consolation to all of us, when he promised to cheer them in my absence by as long and as frequent visits as his other engagements would permit him to make."

Here the beggar paused, and after some minutes continued :

"The sequel to this chapter of my story is too evident to a man of the world. I need not detain you, Sir, with details which I dare say are of every day occurrence, but which, I trust, you may never know by experience as I have done."

Again the beggar paused, and appeared to be undergoing a painful struggle with his emotions. He leant against a lamp-post for support, large drops of perspiration burst out on his forehead, his chest heaved, and his breathings became quick and laboured.

Pierce was touched by the beggar's misfortune, and felt anxious to hear the conclusion of his story ; but he also felt it would be unkind and inconsiderate to rip up an old wound, by making the narrator recall

recollections so evidently painful to him. He therefore told the beggar he must leave him for the present, but, assuring him of his readiness to afford all the assistance in his power, appointed a place to meet him some time in the forenoon of the following day.

The tears that trickled down the beggar's face, showed the sincerity of his gratitude. It had been many a long day since those fountains had been dried with the scorching fierceness of his pent-up wrongs and sorrows. Of many a busy passenger he had asked compassion, that is, he had asked for halfpence to buy the bread which prolonged his miserable existence. He had tried for work, but once or twice had been refused. He had not the heart to try again; nor could he tell to every idle and scornful mocker the deep secret of all his woes: No, he was too proud to purchase life, at the price of proclaiming to the world the infamy of her whom he loved more than all the world

beside. It was a moment of abject wretchedness, indeed, that made him forget his proud resolve. Nevertheless he had forgotten it, and had spoken. But Providence had sent him a ready ear, a heart full of compassion; and amid his tears there came a smile. God's mercy had touched the withered heart of misery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning More rose with a headache and a pair of black eyes. He could not eat his breakfast, so he drank a tumbler of light claret, ate a bunch of grapes, lit his cigar, and threw himself upon the sofa.

The combination of mental and physical neuralgia, which he there enjoyed, was none the more bearable when he reflected how richly it was deserved, how often he had suffered from exactly the same malady before, and how very very often he had resolved never to suffer from it again. Of course, as he rolled over from side to side, seeking

relief to his restlessness in every possible change of posture, and cooling his feverish head on a fresh place in the cushion—of course, he made another and a firmer resolution to reform his evil habits. But this resolution naturally reminded him he had not kept the last, and that it was not very much use making new ones if they were always to be broken.

The reflection had a sad damping influence upon his good intentions. It seemed hopeless to improve at all. He remembered, a long time back, looking forward to some distant period when he would have become so much better a man as to be altogether above the foolish temptations which then beset him. Yet here he was, up to the latest hour of his life—he had never been so old or so wise as now—stretched on his back, and suffering from the effects of one of the most humiliating vices a man could be guilty of. He remembered, in days gone by, to have looked on to the times to come; and to have

promised himself immeasurable happiness in the innocent and useful life he *meant* to lead. And how had that life been led? How had that Past passed away? and what was that Future that had now become a Present? It used to be a very mysterious future once: it was a very evident Present now: not answering at all to those former expectations, but disappointing and distressing indeed, to contemplate. The old forecasting had been through a misty veil, behind which there was a sun; the retrospect was through as puzzling a maze as that had been: but looking back, the confusion increased with the obscurity: and now the ghost of that dead Past rose up with menacing scowls, and shook its skeleton finger, and said with truth-sounding tones, "What is done cannot be undone. Bear that in mind, and be blue-devilled as you well deserve!"

With the memory of neglected duties, many of which had been reviewed the night before

at the opera, came visions of a state more future than the most distant days of this life. These were mightily unpleasant. For Pierce More, poor wretch, had built his views of things to come on no sound rock. No blazing beacon lighted him to the resting haven ; all his lights were will o' the wisp affairs, which he knew would deceive him when he followed them.

As a child he had been trained in the way he should go, nevertheless he *had* departed from it. He had been rigidly instructed in the Church Catechism; had been confirmed ; had even said the Lord's Prayer, at two years old, without a fault. Twice every Sunday he had been sent to church; and if he slept or laughed when there, was made to learn the collect and epistle, till now he knew them nearly all by heart. Even as a child he had always had the dangerous habit of thinking ; and often asked for explanations of things difficult to be explained. Once indeed he told his

pastor that the Athanasian creed was to his mind, a mystification ; and that it was evident the devil had had a hand in the final clause. The good pastor's dismay may be imagined.

His religious education had, in truth, not been neglected. But after education—traveling in foreign countries, much contact with his fellow men, some of whom were far more bigotted than any he had yet seen, and some again more liberal in their ways of thinking—undermined the first foundations ; and compelled him, in self-defence, when he saw the strange diversity, and heterogeneous nature of thinking men's opinions on these vital questions, to form some judgment of his own.

Then came that arch-fool pride of scepticism, persuading that as all men erred, he was no worse than they ; that what none could know, was but conjecture with the wisest. Who should dictate God's laws to him ? Why this man a prophet more than that ? If there were proofs *for*, there were proofs *against* these revelations, whereon creeds were

founded. Above all, that truths of last importance should be truths in the West, and lies in the East, could not be;—one or both were right ; one or both were wrong. Was it then blasphemous to doubt ? So he had been taught in youth ; but *chance* had placed him in the company of doubters. He was not responsible for chance ; nor for the ideas and doubts which chance suggested. Again these doubts arose from exercise of that reason which God had given him for a guide. He might err ; his reason might be weak and wrong ; but error was not crime.

Long to doubt on matters of such deep concern is repulsive to nature. He thought he had been bold ; thought his conclusions were firm and fixed ; but, determine as he would, the ground beneath him was a shifting sand ; and with all his pride and self-gratulation on his boldness ; still he remained

“ In doubt to deem himself a god or beast.”

Had he a soul immortal ? There was the

doubt, neither passion, nor prejudice, nor thoughts of hell flames could solve. To use and not abuse the gift of life—was it not enough? What more than virtue, could the dignity of the soul demand? Established dogmas were after all mainly speculations—they might be established superstitions. Virtue was its own reward—not always—the wicked triumphed—the just were oppressed. Yes! here calm reason—even man's poor sense of justice called for a future state. And if he had a soul—a serious thing to have—a serious thing to be without—it was worth looking to.

When men have wet their feet they care not how deep they wade. More had passed the Rubicon, Cisalpine provinces of faith were left behind. Beyond, lay fields of battle where the subtle hordes of reason and conscience should henceforth struggle for dubious victory.

We cannot harp for long on one discordant string; and this one was sadly out of

tune. So was the whole instrument. From Epicurus, his thoughts trained on to Mammon, and Astarte. But the discord was as great, for the headache was no better, and this was nothing to the heartache.

Pierce groaned and sighed, and thought it was a hard lot to be chained in dulness and inactivity to the soft springy sofa. "Why had he been born?" That oft put question. "No man's lot was worse than his—no man could be more unhappy." Then he began to compare other men's lots with his own; and from a long list he could not pick one so much to be pitied as himself. Till presently he thought of the beggar and *his* story. This at once arrested his selfish flights. Here was one more wretched than himself. And why more wretched? Great misfortunes had afflicted him. But he had not himself to blame. *His* conscience, at least, was unburdened. No! all misfortunes were lighter to bear than a sense of shame and guilt. Yet another of the beggar's ills was poverty.

Hard-fisted, unrelenting, griping poverty ! Hem ! it must be hard to starve. Misfortunes, and a bad conscience might possibly be a trifle more unpalatable to an *empty* stomach than to a *full* one.

More rolled round upon his sofa. It was a very easy sofa ; and considering what a bad headache he had, the wet muddy flag-stones out of doors, would under the circumstances, have been inconvenient to reflection. Yet the beggar reposed on such !

He cast his eyes round his apartment : it was the cabinet of a virtuoso ; the study of a man of letters ; the drawing-room of an exquisite ; the museum of a traveller. He smiled at his own taste and accomplishments.

His thoughts were in another channel. His eye rested on the portrait of a dear friend. The portrait was by himself, and discovered great power in the artist. The friend was dead. His thoughts were divided between a melancholy reminiscence of the

friend ; and a satisfactory contemplation of his own artistic merits !

His piano was open, he had half a mind to try its chords : but the frivolous inclination passed noiselessly into the fifth quarter of the globe : thither transported by the ghastly grin of a dried New Zealander's head. Then miles, and thousands of miles by land and sea were traversed and re-traversed in one drawing of the breath. What many things he had seen, what many remained to see. Here a struggle for life ; there a love affair ; a raging fever ; a kindred spirit seen, and loved, and parted with for ever ; a fight, a carousal ; the long looked for news from home ; the earthquake ; the raging tempest ; the sublime face of nature in frozen ice-peaks, in glowing tropics. And so homewards to the round table within arm's length of the sofa, whereon lay a miniature, and a heap of tradesmen's bills unopened.

Back, back to poverty in an instant !

Piano, portraits, New Zealander's head, and all the valuables in the room would have to be sold up to pay those accursed bills. This pending surplus on the debtor's side of his account was a bug-bear of some standing. As often as it visited him, he tried to forget it: but its visits of late had become more frequent and more importunate. It was becoming pretty obvious to him that he must soon do more than shut his eyes, or he would get such a hug from the bear as he could ill put up with. The deficit must be choked, or it would swallow *him*.

Clear as this was to his understanding, he still lived on without making any positive effort to avert the *dies iræ*. On the contrary, he grew more reckless as his fate grew more inevitable. He gave more orders, paid less ready money, and gambled more than ever. He shrank from the memory of last night's debauch, and the fresh incubus which his losses entailed. He saw no remedy whatever, no loophole whereby to escape his ruin.

Even to relieve the starving want of the beggar would leave him penniless. Yet to send that man empty away would be the bitterest pang his extravagance could inflict, or his pride sustain.

He tore open two or three of the bills. Some were enclosed in attorney's letters requesting immediate payment, with the penalties in case of refusal. Amongst his letters were invitations to balls and evening parties ; one from Lady Bellfable which he thought was written in the daughter's hand. His heart beat quickly as he examined the characters of the hand-writing. He threw it down, afraid to think of what these feelings might lead to. Marriage ! What had he to do with marriage ? He should hardly be able to keep himself from starving in a little while perhaps. Did he want to starve Miss Trammers, and, perhaps— ? Again his heart beat, and he blushed.

Another cover contained a large card with the Duchess of Phatanappy's name upon it. He thought of the time when the receipt of such

a card was the height of his ambition. When he saw such cards as these stuck in the looking-glasses of all the fashionable young men of his acquaintance, and would have taken any amount of pains to obtain one to ornament his own chimney-piece, and excite the envy of younger men than himself. He looked at the card twice; and was ashamed to think that he was actually tempted to stick it on the chimney-piece; but he thought how contemptible this would be, and even took the trouble to throw it into the fire.

And now what cheer? A small note and a woman's hand-writing—more palpitations of the heart! Better by far live in the wilderness, beware of pleasuredom, and seek a “world of glass.” But dry wood will burn. What another of the elect! Even so, poor daughter of sin and shame! She once had reigned as queen of hearts. What filthy kennels the clearest streams are sometimes turned to! The paper swelled in

little blots where tears had fallen on the words. He read :

“ Sir,

“ I write as a suppliant. Condemn me not with scorn, for you cannot know the sufferings which have driven me to this extremity. Perhaps you hate me ; I have treated your addresses with contempt ; I have told you that I hated you ; and with truth I told it you. When with foul offerings you thought to purchase my guilt and misery, you saw me degraded to the lowest depths of shame that woman’s nature can endure. You mistook my hollow mirth for unblushing want of modesty, and you believed my wantonness to be at the command of the highest bidder.

“ I do not murmur, I do not blame you. Once I sinned against God and man. The vengeance that pursues me I acknowledge to be just. Would to heaven I alone might bear the wretchedness which I alone

deserve. But there are others upon whom the evil of my sin has fallen. My child ! and that child's father.

“ Sir, it is to you—whom in the bitterness of my heart I have unjustly cursed—to you, upon whom I have no earthly claim, except that of having saved you from a hideous crime, that I now appeal. Oh ! do not remember me as you have seen me—submitting to the insolence of the fiend you blindly call your friend. Hear the passionate cries of a mother pleading for her child ! Hear the broken-hearted accents of a penitent wife ! Soon this voice shall be for ever still ; who then shall pray for mercy for the helpless orphan ?

“ You are rich. I have seen touches of kindness in your nature. You would have made me worse—more sinful than I am. You have escaped a base act ; will you not now do a noble one ? As you hope for mercy from your Heavenly Father afford pro-

tection to the child who soon will have no parent. *At least come to see me !*"

Pierce read the note over mechanically a second time while he pondered on its contents.

"Is there nothing but misery in this world? Misery! The lot of this mother about to leave it, the lot of the child about to enter it! Yet some it spares, and why not others? Why not *all*? If He that rules be *good*? Granted this misery is the wage of sin. But life is sin. Forced to live, I am forced to sin. 'Twas no wish, no fault of mine to live! Why then am I to suffer for what I cannot help? Again, the wages of sin are death. Not enough to suffer here—but hereafter also I must suffer.

"Great God! A secret power moves my mind to feel and to acknowledge that Thou art good. Oh! why am I so blind? Why see alone the chastisement, and be denied the power to worship the design? If there be light to

illumine our darkened minds, teach us where to find it! I know that Thou art *good*. It were easier to believe there is no God, than to believe that Thou art evil."

He paused and buried his face in his hands.

"Yes," he presently continued; "I *have* hopes in Thy mercy; and I will protect this woman's child!"

He rose to ring the bell, but his servant entered and announced Mr. Winter.

"How are the eyes, old fellow, after that brute's rough handling last night?" inquired the visitor, throwing himself into an arm-chair as he spoke. "Not much the worse, I hope?"

"No," said More, "the swelling's gone down, but I expect they'll be black for a week. Confound the fellow! he has given me a splitting headache, and I have had a fit of the blues all the morning. What will you have—some light claret? It's very fair tipples for

hot weather. There's some white curacoa and cherry-brandy in the liqueur-case."

"No thank ye; I'll ring for some pale ale and soda-water."

In going to the bell, Winter's eye fell on the note More had just been reading, and which now lay open on the table.

"Hulloa!" said he, taking it up, "a billet from Flora? what says my beauty? May I read it? I'll be bound to say she pays me a pretty compliment."

More hesitated to answer; and Winter, who had turned his back to hide a slight twittering in the muscles of his face, soon skimmed through its contents.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, as he coolly folded the note and returned it to its cover; "that is an exquisite piece of composition, and deserves to be framed. She is tired of me and wants a new lover. I told you she would come round at last; that dodge of hanging back was only to whet your appetite.

I should recommend you to strike while the iron is hot. These women are capricious devils, I can tell you. 'Pon my life she's 'cuter than I thought she was !”

“What do you mean, Winter? you can't persuade me that this letter is humbug? The poor woman says she is dying.”

“Dying ! yes, I should think so ! Why, confound her impudence ! I only parted from her an hour since, and she wanted me to give her ten pounds to pay for a supper party. Dying ! ha ! ha ! I like this. Why, you can't be such a goose as not to see through such a bare-faced trick as this ! She wants you to adopt her brat, and then she'll swear you are the father of it. D—n these women ! it's always the case : no matter how much kindness you show 'em, they are sure to turn upon you at last. Just see how she abuses me now ! For the last three years she has been a regular sinking fund to me. She has cost me mints of money, and now hasn't a penn'orth of gratitude for all my

kindness. I didn't mean to throw her over, but considering how ill she behaves, and how deucedly I am out of pocket by her, I think it's high time to let her shift for herself. To change the subject, what shocking bad luck we all had last night! I lost most awfully. You came off pretty well, didn't you?"

"Not I: I believe I was the heaviest loser of the lot."

"But what's a few hundreds to you? If I were a rich fellow like you, More, I would spend a thousand a-year in gambling, willingly."

"A thousand a-year, my good fellow! why I haven't much more to live upon. The fact is, I have been losing money, and fooling it away for the last eighteen months: and I'll be hanged, Winter, if I don't think it's your confounded example."

"Come, come, that's too bad: you know, my dear Pierce, I am about the steadiest man of your acquaintance. But you don't mean to say you are really hard up—

I was going to ask you to back a bill for me."

"I would in a minute if I could; but on my honour I am deuced near cleaned out; and what's more, see nothing for it but to bolt."

"Well! I'm all for a short life and a merry one. But never say die while there's a shot in the locker. Moreton ought to be good for a round sum."

"Don't hint at it; I wouldn't sell Moreton on any account."

"I confess it is a bore sending the halls of one's ancestors to the hammer; but you can put it up the spout for a time."

"It's already mortgaged to the park walls; and money is so scarce that one could not raise much on it now."

"Oh! I don't know; I fancy you might get ten or fifteen thousand pounds, easy enough. Haven't you any money in the funds?"

"Yes, but they're so low I don't like to

sell out. The fact is, I am so confoundedly ignorant about business matters, that I shrink from facing lawyers and their red tape. I wonder who I could consult on the matter."

"Who is your own agent or man of business? He is the man to go to."

"He is the biggest fool in the world, and perfectly useless."

"Then I would go to the man who holds the mortgage on your estate: he is the most likely person to advance you a further sum. Do you know who he is?"

"I ought to know him; he receives half my income. He is an attorney of the name of Bellerby. By-the-way, it used to be "Bellerby and Winter," I believe—a namesake of yours."

"Lor! fancy having an attorney for a namesake! But it's a common enough name. Well, I should advise you to write to him on the subject at once, and ask him all the particulars."

“I will! I’ll write by to-day’s post. What time is it? Why it’s three o’clock, by Jove! and I have only just finished breakfast. Confound it! now that is provoking! I never thought of it till now.”

“What? — thought of what?” asked Winter.

“Nothing; only I promised to meet a man at one to-day, and I forgot all about it.”

“Most likely he will have forgotten all about it too.”

More knew well enough that the man with whom he made the appointment was not at all likely to have forgotten it—poor fellow! he might be starved by this time.

“Very likely;” he said.

“There’s somebody at the door;” said Winter.

“Come in!”

A servant entered, and presented a note to More.

“From Longvale,” observed More, as he broke the seal, and read aloud :

“My dear Pierce,

“I am going to Mona in a day or two, and wish you would come with me, and stay till the first week after the twelfth. Our moors are not worth much in Wales, but I hear there are a good few birds; and I dare say we can make it out somehow. I am going to ask Gerard Winter to be of the party. As to who will be there besides, I can't say. The only person I hear is asked, is the old stick-in-the-mud who, I told you, lectured me at Homburg as an old friend of my father's. Just fancy what a bore! I expect to catch it. I hope my cousin Eda will be there; I should like you to know her. She is a regular stunner. I hope you are none the worse for the row I hear you got into last night. Let me know if you will come.

“Yours very sincerely,

“ARTHUR LONGVALE.”

“P.S. There's a report that Pumpton

is to marry Miss Trammers, and that he proposed and was accepted last night at Lady Bellfable's."

"P.P.S. You had better bring your rods."

"Do you mean to go?" said Winter.

"Go? I don't know. Ha! ha! ha!" laughed More, hysterically, "Miss Trammers going to marry that fool Pumpton! Wonders will never cease. She told me last night—actually last night—that she thought him a tremendous bore."

"Ah! that was before he proposed. It does not give a woman much trouble to change her mind."

"It appears not. Well, if she isn't a flirt, I never saw one."

"My dear fellow, they are all alike."

"Oh! it's disgusting, upon my life. I can't believe it—it is too absurd!"

"What? — that Miss Trammers should accept a coronet and twenty thousand a-year?"

I don't think it is so very absurd when you come to think of it."

"No, but then a man like Pumpton, who positively hasn't two ideas to bless himself with. And besides, when I remember all the things— Well! one lives and learns!" And More lit a cigar, and puffed away as if determined the affair should end in smoke one way or another.

"Any answer, sir?" enquired the servant, with his hand on the door.

"Yes, stop a minute. Give me the blotting-book off the writing-table. There!" said he, folding up the answer, "I'll go to Mona Castle as soon as Longvale likes. I am sick of London and everything else."

"Well, I must be off," said Winter, "I must go and leave some pasteboards. Ta! ta! Don't forget to write to Billyboy, or whatever you call him. I hope you'll be all straight by the time we meet at Mona. Take care of yourself!"

CHAPTER IX.

So saying, Winter left the room. We also will leave Mr. More to arrange his pecuniary difficulty, and to enjoy, as he no doubt would, the pleasing intelligence that Miss Trammers was to become the bride of Lord Pumpton. A disappointed lover and a bankrupt is not the most agreeable of companions. When More was alone with himself, he experienced for the first time in his life the truth of this position. He had yet to learn the real bitterness of these hostile weapons of "outrageous fortune."

Winter had played his part judiciously. Ever at More's elbow, the force of his insidious example had answered his most sanguine expectations. By a long and patient course of, what may be called, methodical villainy, he had dug that pit into which his quarry was now about to fall. By encouraging on every occasion More's natural bent for extravagance, Pierce had at last reduced his dilapidated fortune to a state nearly allied to ruin. The suggestion he made to More to relieve his difficulties by borrowing money, was, in the eyes of his unsuspecting victim, the natural advice of an amiable friend. He had not even mentioned the name of Bellerby. He had cunningly led Pierce on to propose the negociation with his own attorney. If this scheme had failed, he meant to have produced Bellerby by way of an accidental acquaintance, with whom he had money transactions, as a fitter person for the emergency than any Pierce might have named. He also intended to have

made his share in the matter so great a favour as to have induced More to back his bill in reward for his assistance. This main object was not, however, lost sight of; but he devised another plan for executing it. Instead of leaving visiting cards, as he had just pretended to be his intention, he hastened to his lodgings and wrote the following note to Mr. Bellerby.

“Dear Sir,

“It is now nearly three months since you last heard from me. I have not been idle. The important moment is arrived. The citadel has surrendered at discretion, and requires immediate support to repair the injuries sustained in its protracted siege. By the same post you will receive a demand for supplies. I *caution you*. If you value them, make them dear. The present state of the money market is a sufficient blind to a mouse whose knowledge of business is about equal to an attorney’s sense of morality.

On no account accede to his request. *Your* interest, as well as *mine*, depends on your positive refusal. He knows of no understanding between us, so remember my name is Junius.

“Your obedient servant,
“G. W.”

Primed with this information, Mr. Bellerby being of opinion that the danger of obeying Winter's injunctions was fully counterbalanced by the danger of acting in opposition to them, wrote to More as he had been directed. This disappointment to his anxious hopes for a temporary support, again reduced Pierce to a state of despondency. He had made Winter his confidant. Without doubting this man's integrity, he had formed the highest opinion of his shrewdness and perspicacity. His only expectation now depended on Winter's advice ; and of this he resolved to avail himself as soon as their meeting at Mona should afford him an opportunity.

It was on the day before his departure from town, that he again fell in with the beggar whom he had desired to meet him there three days previously. Saville Row had been the place appointed for the interview. They had parted at the Piccadilly entrance to the Albany; and the beggar concluding that the liberal-minded gentleman had chambers in the arcade, had watched for his exit each succeeding morning.

His patience was at last rewarded. As More was sallying forth to make a few farewell visits, the beggar accosted him; and reminded him of his charitable promises. Pierce at once recognized the unfortunate object who had already excited his interest and compassion. He, however, was not prepared to hold a long conversation in the public street with so ragged an acquaintance. Feeling rather ashamed of his *protégé*, and still more ashamed at his own want of moral courage, he told the mendicant to follow him back to his chambers.

As soon as they were seated, and the beggar had drank a glass of wine, and eaten a few mouthfuls of a game pie, which More fetched with his own hands from the pantry, the ragged story-teller, at the instigation of his host, resumed his narrative from the point of interruption on the preceding night.

“I did but hint,” he began, “at the most fatal catastrophe of my life. I cannot now recur to it in calmness. I dare not recall the state of mind I endured for months. It was next to madness. I hardly know what became of me. I believe I made many attempts to destroy myself. I had no sooner recovered sufficient strength to leave the sick chamber where I had been confined, than I escaped from the hands of my relations, and, without leaving any traces of my steps, directed all my energies to the discovery of the wretch who had poisoned the fountain of my whole existence. One in his position in society was not difficult to find.

“When I had ascertained his residence in London, my first impulse was to way-lay him at night, and secretly plunge a dagger into his heart. But I changed my mind. I did not shrink from the fate of a murderer : I should have given myself up at once ; and have been glad to die. I had nothing more to live for—the last tie to earth had been snapped. But I thought the act was cowardly : and again—so sudden a fate would have robbed me of my full revenge. I waited a more fitting moment ; and following him to the door of his club, I caught him standing amidst a knot of friends. A riding whip in my hand, and hardly giving him time to start at my unearthly apparition, I seized him by the collar, and exclaiming ‘ Devil ! Coward ! and Beast ! I thus chastise you ! ’ struck him two or three times in the face with all my strength and passion.

“The friends around him, one of whom was also an acquaintance of mine, interposed, and hurried him within the club

doors. I waited outside, and in a minute or two was joined by the person who knew me, and who had heard the cause of the insult. He offered to be my second. It was needless to talk of a reconciliation. A meeting was arranged for the following day: and, that I might not keep my adversary waiting, I walked to the ground that evening, and remained on the spot all night.

“You have read of a thousand duels: you may have witnessed one for aught I know. I will not trespass on your patience. It was not my intention to kill him, as I before told you. I had acquired considerable skill in the use of the pistol while in India; my object was to wound him in such a manner as to render him an unsightly cripple for life. Too anxious in my purpose, I failed. My shot left him untouched; and I received a wound which in a few moments rendered me insensible, and unable to fire again.

“Believing that my wound would prove fatal, my enemy had left the country for

North America. I did not follow him, as might have been expected. By the time I had recovered from the effects of the shot, all my angry passions had given place to a sullen state of dejection. When I thought of my wife, it was as of one dead and lost to me for ever. I had no wish to see her; but rather hoped that she might never again cross my path. My only wish was to die. How many have wished the same, and have been condemned to live!

“During my illness, I had been kept in a hospital, where the acquaintance who had been my second had placed me at my own request. Sufficiently restored to be no longer in need of medical attendance, I was obliged to quit this place of shelter. I was entirely destitute of means; and, although more inclined to starve than provide for my subsistence, a sudden desire possessed me to join the Indian army, and seek a grave in the first battle I was engaged in. I repaired to Chatham, where the ——th was re-

cruiting. My new resolution had inspired me with new life, and I longed to be enlisted and to quit for ever my native land.

“ Notwithstanding my health was much impaired by the two illnesses, my constitution was naturally vigorous, and I never questioned the fact of my making an acceptable recruit. I, who had been an officer, had no excuse for so great an oversight. I might have known the examination a private soldier is subject to before he enters the ranks ; probably I underrated the serious consequences of my wound. The surgeon of the regiment declared my lungs to be injured, and that it was impossible for any surgeon in the army to admit me: I was in despair. I even confided to him a part of my story. I told him I had been an officer in the army, had received the wound in a duel, had accidentally lost all my property, and had no other means of recovering my position as a gentleman than by returning to the profession which I had left,

in the hope of gradually rising from the ranks to the station I once held.

“He was an amiable man, and professed to take an interest in my case, which he represented to the head of his department at the Horse Guards. I obtained an interview with an officer who possessed considerable influence with the authorities, and who for some time held out expectations of an exception being made in my favour. By these promises I was kept for several weeks in a state of suspense. Till finding those to whom I made application wearying at my solicitations, I perceived that my purpose was futile, and resigned it in disgust for any occupation chance might throw in my way.

“The exertions I had been making had in some measure mitigated my sorrows, and lessened my aversion to activity. One day, glancing at the supplement of the ‘Times’ newspaper, in a small coffee-house, I accidentally read in the columns of advertisements, ‘Wanted, an attorney’s clerk, in one

of the market towns in the north of England.'

"I had from the first moment of my disgrace adhered to a firm resolution never to return to my own family, or to that part of the country with which such painful associations were connected. This town was situated in a part of England far from my own home, and I thought, if I could obtain the situation under the assumed name of Taylor, I might pass the remainder of my days in tranquillity and obscurity.

"Fortune for once favoured me, and partly through the intercession of an angel of light, the attorney's daughter, to whom I imparted an outline of my history, I obtained the humble office I aspired to. For the space of three years I acquitted myself in that office to the entire satisfaction of my employer; until an accident again cast me an adventurer upon the world.

"By the merest chance I became possessed of a secret scheme of villainy between my

master and man who I believe had once been a partner in the firm. The desire to discover the whole plot, and save the person whom they designed to ruin, was now my only excuse for remaining under that roof. I used the most careful vigilance to detect the conspiracy, but could lay my hands on no document relating to it. I once thought of laying the matter before a magistrate, and bringing my fellow-clerk to swear to the conversation he had overheard; but esteem and gratitude to my kind benefactress constrained me to be silent: and with nothing to support me but the reward of my own conscience I left my situation, to beg my way up to this great sink of wretchedness, where the ablest efforts of an honest man in vain compete with the crafty expedients of every kind of turpitude.

“Visit the haunts of burglars and felons; picture to yourself scenes of vice and misery more horrible than you could believe to exist, and you may have some idea of the tragic

parts I have been forced to play, and am familiar with.

“Would you tell me that a man of education, and with a will to apply it, need never starve—need never come to this? I would have said so once. It is a common assertion of those who live in affluence. Yes! ’tis easy to be very poor, and yet to live. But to be without a penny, without one friend—to live and still be *honest*, is harder than they think for!

“Sir, my story is ended. I know not who you are; but were you to put a hundred pounds into my hands this minute, I could not thank you so sincerely from my heart, as now I do, for that one tear of sympathy. May God Almighty bless you, and, if one poor sinner’s prayers avail in heaven, may you be rewarded as you deserve!”

More’s heart was too full to answer, or he would have told the beggar that he, Pierce More, was much the greater sinner of the two, and, much the less deserving of the two.

And if any one ever did deserve the very contrary treatment to reward, it was he. And the possibility that such reward might, at no very distant period, be meted to him, made his past life still more hateful to him than it had ever appeared before.

“No, no!” said Pierce, with his heart at the top of his throat. “Don’t talk so my good fellow, I don’t deserve it, I don’t indeed! Here, here’s ten pound for you. I wish I could give you more—but—but just now I have no money about me. Oh, nonsense!” he continued, as the beggar thrust back the note; “you must take it. Come, I will only lend it to you then; and if I can get something for you to do, you shall pay it back again when you are well off. You must come and look me up again when that’s done. Now I must run out for I’m late, so good luck to you!”

They parted at the entrance to the Arcade. More got into a cab and drove off to Belgravia. The beggar waited till he was

out of sight; then returning to the porter's lodge asked the name of his benefactor.

"Mr. More," said the porter gruffly.

"More!" exclaimed the beggar; "do you know where he lives in the country?"

"What's that to you?" said the porter, more gruffly; "ax! and find out! if you wants to know. He aint a pal o' yours, is he?"

The half sneer, half grin, which accompanied this last sally of the porter's wit was meant as a final answer. The beggar remembered his rags, and walked away.

In the course of the day an indistinct recollection came across him that Posthumus Mobbs had said something about Mr. More of Moreton being a lame man. He could not be sure that he had heard this; but there was at all events a possibility that the man who had been so kind to him was the identical person in danger of being ruined, and that he might have a speedy opportunity of showing his gratitude by acquainting this

gentleman with the conversation which Posthumus had overheard.

The chance of making some return for the benevolent treatment he had just met with, added joy to his present good fortune. He wrote to More stating what he had learnt from Mobbs: at the same time mentioning the names of Bellerby and Winter, and excusing the step he had taken, in the supposition that he was addressing the person whom the information really concerned. He carried this letter with him the next morning to the Albany. More had already left town: but the porter put the letter in his pocket; promising to have it forwarded, or to deliver it to the gentleman on his return from the country.

CHAPTER X.

MONA CASTLE is situated in one of the most beautiful districts in North Wales. Portions of the ancient building are supposed to be of a date prior to the conquest. According to muniments, still in possession of the family, it is said to have been conferred by Edward I. upon one Simon de Longuevalle, a military tenant of Mortimer's, who had the good fortune to slay the unhappy Lewellyn with his own sword, and received the demesnes of Mona as the reward of his personal prowess.

The castle retains at the present day few

traces of early architecture. The rude hands of the elements, and the still rougher handling of the civil wars have left but the mere outline of its feudal aspect ; and, although it still has the appearance of a baronial castle, much of this appearance is merged in a peaceful atmosphere of modern domesticity.

The huge, uneven pile stands on the crest of a thickly wooded eminence. The road by which it is approached winds up a steep ascent. On the other side, a succession of terraces end abruptly in a precipitous declivity, at the bottom of which, embedded in birch trees and alders, runs a deep and rapid stream. The upper flights of terrace are laid out in flower-beds of every shape and hue. At one end, the garden is enclosed by a broad ballustrade of white marble ornamented with casts of the most celebrated of the Grecian statues. At the other, it terminates in a square plot of grass, tended with as much care now as when the game of bowls

was the favourite amusement of its earlier possessors.

The court-yard is entered by an archway so completely overgrown with ivy that the Longvale arms, surmounting the porch, are almost concealed. Indeed the arms themselves are so worn and defaced that a learned antiquary would be puzzled now to make out the boars' heads on the shield, or even the rampant wolves that support it.

The hall is a lofty room, the whole height of the centre of the building. The greater part of it is filled by the oak staircase, which is nearly as dark as ebony, and broad enough for twenty men to march up a-breast. To the left of the hall, and on the same floor, is a long gallery, a division of which is still used as the family chapel: the other part remains as a library. This room overlooks the flower-terraces and the dell beyond them. One of its windows is towards the rising, the other towards the setting

sun. Always bright and cheerful, it forms a pleasant contrast to the sombre old chambers on the other sides of the castle.

The dining-room, which corresponds, on the opposite side of the hall, is one of the most perfect specimens of its class in the kingdom. Its shape is oblong ; with one deep recess for the windows. The panels in the wall are richly inlaid with ebony. The ceiling is formed by intersecting arches, the apex of the groins bearing the crest, the monogram, the arms, and the motto of the Longvales. Above the paneling, is a sort of entablature whereon are painted in brightest colours grotesque figures of armed knights sallying forth from a castle no bigger than a mouse-trap ; and melancholy damsels playing lutes, the finger-boards of which are in the clouds ; with gaudy pages standing behind them, to whom the perspective gives such prominent positions, that they appear to be

walking on their mistress' heads. The large stone mullions in the windows obstruct the light: while all that enters is subdued and tinted by stained-glass, also bearing the arms and mottoes of the family. Over the large oak chimney piece is suspended a burgonet, with a corselet and tasset adjoined. They are preserved as relics of the harness worn by one of the Lords de Longuevalle in the Holy Land.

What thrilling images of chivalry and the dark ages these tokens recall! Alone in their presence we forget the anachronism of costume, and are for the moment Amadis of chivalric zeal. Behold! a score of armed knights are seated at the festive board, haughty dames are listening to their tales of warlike deeds, planning some new scheme to prove their loyal daring. We choosing some radiant beauty from out the throng kneel to her, and while she ties her scarf across our mail-clad breast, swear eternal

constancy and love!—Oh, fatal bathos ! Two plush-legged footmen enter to lay the cloth, and a mob-capped housemaid comes to stir the fire. That distant rattling sound is no clump of spearmen ranging the fair champagne. We know too well the familiar rattle of the “bounder.”

“The hill’s enough to make ’em blow—Through the archway, post-boy ! The new gravel is heavy with the rain.” The chaise pulls up : More’s servant rings the noisy hall bell. Arthur Longvale is there in a minute ; and welcomes Pierce to his uncle’s house with a manner that becomes the heir apparent well.

“I thought you weren’t coming, Pierce ! You never said what day you’d be here. Well, I’m deuced glad to see you. I expected Winter would have come with you ; but I suppose he’ll be here by a late train.”

“How long does it want to dinner, Arthur ?”

“About a couple of hours, I think. Would you like to see your room? or shall we have a game of billiards? It’s a first-rate table.”

“Hadn’t I better go and pay my respects to his lordship?”

“He isn’t come home yet. He’s out riding with my cousin. She only came back to-day. She has been staying with my father, who is laid up with a fit of the gout.”

“Who are the party here? anybody I know?”

“No, nobody I think. They are all country people, except, by the way, the ‘porpoise,’ whom you know.”

“Heaven defend us! What a splendid old house this is.”

“Yes, it’s a fine thing in its way. I’ll show you one or two of the rooms.”

As they looked into the drawing-room they saw three or four ladies at work. The two young men, as young men always will be,

were alarmed at the formidable conclave ; and, begging pardon for something that was neither heard nor spoken, instantly withdrew.

“Whereabouts is my room ?” said More.

“Come along, I’ll show you.”

It was a curious old tapestried apartment, with an enormous bed in an alcove ; which might be shut off at pleasure from the rest of the room, by a pair of heavy faded damask curtains.

Longvale hoping that his guest approved of the quarters, and that he had got everything he wanted, left him to the care of his servant who was busily engaged in unpacking the portmanteaux.

A strange room in a strange house is not usually comfortable. But there is a degree of adaptability and an air of repose about these old chambers, in our English country-houses, which soon make one on the best of terms with them. Besides this, Pierce had an excellent valet. And with a handy servant,

who thoroughly understands his master's habits—who never puts the right slipper on the wrong foot, who is quick without bustling, who knows where his presence is required, and where his absence, and who has, moreover, the happy knack of making any room in five minutes look like his master's own room—it is no hard matter to be physically comfortable.

The two or three hours before dinner, in a large country-house, ere one can legitimately and honourably retreat to one's private apartment, are often the most tedious in the day ; especially when the days begin to shorten, and out-door amusements are exchanged for the dullness of the unlighted drawing-room. But what a luxury is the coziness of your particular fire as the time for dressing approaches ! —a time when men betake themselves to dressing-gown and slippers, and stick their feet upon the fender with a conscious pride of having done a good day's work—in other words, of having got an appetite for dinner ; when women wash down what little appetite

their luncheon left them with a cup of tea, and take a nap to make them fresh for the evening; or sit for half an hour before the looking-glass to have their hair done, and read, the while, the last new novel. It is a cozy time, indeed; and More, with all his grievances, as he sat buried in an arm-chair, screening his face with his book, could not help smiling to think how cozy and comfortable it was.

Pierce would have been glad to have enjoyed for any length of time this state of luxurious repose. But he was troubled with that peculiar temperament to which modern physiologists have applied the compound term of nervous-bilious: and this idiosyncrasy entailed upon him the severe infliction of an active mind. As, therefore, it had befallen him the day before, under afflicting circumstances, to wonder at the unequal distribution of misery in the world, and to experience certain rebellious feelings at the apparent caprice of fortune to his cost; so, now—as he

drew his silk dressing-robe around him, and felt that his chief care for his maintenance of present comfort consisted in keeping the soles of his feet from scorching—it occurred to him that fortune's whim was far more apt to treat him in this way than in any other. And it required no great skill in logic to bring him to the conclusion that he had as little right to claim the one condition, as he had to be exempt from the other.

Coupled with this conviction, a very undefined sense of duty again crossed his mind. Again he asked himself, "was he born for no higher mission than to lounge in cushioned chairs? To dawdle through life—useless to himself—and to everybody else? He was fast wearying of this slothful monotony. But what was he to do? He did his best, when called upon to do so. The mother pleading for her defenceless child whispered a reproof. But then, this must be a lie? Winter had seen her just before, and she was in perfect health. Yet was there an air

of truth about the letter ; and if by chance it should be true, and if Winter—it was not the first suspicion he had entertained of Winter's good faith—should be deceiving him, would he not have to answer for a neglect of duty here ?

“ But he was so badly off, he could not do much for the poor creature. What on earth could he do with a child three years old ? After all, there were hundreds, nay, thousands of women in the same predicament. Poor things ! it was a sad fate, that of those lost women : and ten times worse in a case like this of an educated woman ! There were for them but two ways of averting their wretched fate : one to repent—the other —— Heaven ! what an alternative ! to bury misery in excess of misery, to heap vice upon vice, sin upon sin, till conscience, memory, heart, reason, and remorse were all palsied, and blotted out. Bah ! what devils' work it is ! And this poor wretch with a soul—if any had one—most ill-adapted

to her fate, more pitiable than others ! Why were men like Winter, who committed such crimes, not permitted to see the full extent of misery they brought with them ? Did Winter talk of her ingratitude ? Could he forget the injury he had done her ? If he did, if he saw her suffer and felt no shame, if he abandoned her without regret, without an effort to save her, surely some retributive justice would punish the crime !”

From one subject to another, More fell to conjecturing how soon Winter might arrive, to advise him as to the means of procuring money. The reflections he had a few minutes before been indulging in, materially injured Winter in his estimation ; but, these suspicions of his friend’s honesty did not the least affect his high opinion of Winter’s resources in all matters where monetary difficulties were concerned. On him, as we have before seen, he mainly relied for immediate pecuniary relief.

His thoughts took another turn, and he

began to speculate on the probable characters of the party into which he was about to be introduced. He knew none of them, personally, except his friend Arthur. Longvale had often spoken to him of his uncle; describing him as a somewhat bigoted aristocrat; captious to all who differed from his opinions; exceeding proud of his family descent; profusely hospitable; slightly whimsical; and truly warm-hearted. One of the guests, with whom Pierce was fully prepared to become intimate, was the old gentleman, whose timely admonitions to Arthur had found their way into several of his late reveries.

For the lady portion of the company, he felt no particular interest—nor, as yet, curiosity. Miss Trammers had occupied what small chambers of his heart had been to let; and, although those apartments were now vacated, some preparatory sweepings and whitewashings were necessary, before they would be again in a fit condition to receive another tenant.

CHAPTER XI.

SLEEPY, and not the least hungry, he was roused by his valet, and informed that the dressing-bell had sounded a quarter of an hour. Pierce, without foppishness, was careful about his dress. A trifle vain, he flattered himself he could in a quarter of an hour produce as much effect as was to be expected from a man, who placed more reliance on conversational powers, than in the arrangement of a naturally well-curled head of hair.

This day, however, he exceeded by a few minutes his usual dressing time; and, as

Lord Longvale happened to be one of those Grand Lamas of Thibet who would have sentenced his cook to death for keeping him waiting thirty seconds, More's first presentation to his lordship took place in the midst of dinner. Lord Longvale shook his nephew's friend warmly by the hand, and, muttering something about "sharp hours, and cold soup," pointed to the only vacant chair at the table.

Having spread his napkin over his knees, pulled down his wristbands, and turned his rings with that exquisite supineness so indispensable to the manners of a gentleman, Pierce took two mouthfuls of soup before he condescended to cast his eyes either upon his right neighbour or his left.

On one hand sat a stout elderly gentleman, not unlike a porpoise with a pair of extra fins for legs. On the other, a young lady of any age between seventeen and twenty. The young lady he had never seen before. The "porpoise" he knew well

by sight ; for he hardly ever walked down St. James's Street, without meeting him, umbrella in hand, about to enter a club ; where he was universally known and respected as the most dangerous man for a button-hole gossip in society.

Sir Andrew Fitzbun, first cousin of Lord St. Brooke's, was a widower, with half-a-dozen grown-up daughters. Sir Andrew had a house in town ; where, unfortunately for his numerous acquaintances, he resided two-thirds of the year, on account of his official duties as a director of the Metropolitan Mud and Dust-hole Company. The remaining third he dedicated to inconveniencing his most distinguished country friends, who tolerated him, simply because they were compelled to do so ; and who afforded him a reluctant week of hospitality, just as some persons pay inferior street-sweepers once in twelve months, to avoid their tiresome importunity for the rest of the year.

No little might be added respecting this cele-

brated character ; but courtesy calls our attention to Pierce's other neighbour. As we have already remarked, two of the personages now in juxtaposition were entirely unknown to each other. Mr. More felt it incumbent upon him to take the initiatory step. It was, " May I trouble you for the salt ?"

This question, though boldly designed and promptly executed, did not necessarily involve a reply. The salt was passed ; no reply was vouchsafed ; and the desired end so much the farther removed by the failure of the commendable attempt made to reach it.

" How very punctual we were to-day !" said More, with his best possible smile. " Such respect for a cook's feelings is a remarkable instance of humanity rarely to be met with. Does Lord Longvale always regulate our digestive organs by his kitchen clock ?"

Here was a long-winded sentence ; and More pronounced it so slowly that it gave him plenty of time to read the features

of the person he was addressing. He could not tell whether she was handsome, or not. He was answered by a faint smile—

“She believed he did.”

This was not encouraging. The smile was provokingly indifferent. Pierce was not accustomed to such treatment. Who was this girl who thus received the advances of a fashionable hero with a nominal income of two thousand a-year? Probably some country Miss who knew no better. He looked at her again. She was not what is called a “beauty.” If she had been, her manner were easily understood. She was not stupid: her face beamed with intelligence. She could scarcely be shy: her manner was so calm. Had she been either a beauty, or stupid, he would have thought no more about her. Something more than beauty—more even than intelligence—interested him, attracted him. He sent away his soup, and set to work to break the ice with a volley of common-place insipidities. To

these he hardly ever received a reply—scarcely even a look. “Ah!” thought Pierce, “I see what this means.” And he cast a glance round the table in search of the sympathetic twin. A young lady opposite, making eyes at him, was the only suspicious object in the company.

At length, with an overpowering effort at civility, his neighbour asked *in-à-propos* to anything and everything, “if he was fond of hunting?”

“Here,” thought Pierce, “is an opening!”

“No,” he replied, with a careless swagger; —“he seldom or ever hunted unless he thought the hounds were sure of a good run.” There was now an opportunity to remark that, unless he was blessed with second sight, he was not likely to see much sport. But no answer.

“Are *you* fond of riding?” he continued.

“Yes, rather,” said the girl. “Why don’t you like hunting? Most men like hunting.”

“I don’t know—it’s too tame. I used to think the chance of breaking one’s neck rather exciting once; but since I’ve shot my lion in Numidia, and my cannibal in New Zealand, I find hunting is a bore, especially as one might lose a front tooth and be blemished for life by it.”

The young lady slightly turned her face, and cast an inquiring look upon More. Did she conclude he was a coxcomb? “Is shooting lions dangerous sport?” she asked.

“Not at all that I know of,” replied Pierce.

“Then I wonder it amuses you, since you are fond of excitement.”

“It doesn’t amuse me at all. In fact, I think it extremely foolish to shoot lions.”

“Then why shoot them?”

“Because most people think it a fine thing to have shot lions.”

“What a strange motive!”

“Not at all. It is the commonest motive in the world for everything men do.”

“And you like to imitate the rest of the world?”

“To be sure! There is no greater folly than affecting singularity.”

Whether or no More cared for the opinion of the young lady he was addressing, he had conceived sufficient respect for her discernment, to have little apprehension lest she should fall into the ridiculous error of believing, that the wish to do like most people was a motive that ever actuated him.

“Lord Longvale is asking you to drink wine,” said Sir Andrew Fitzbun.

“I beg his pardon—with much pleasure. Whatever you please, Sir. I take sherry.”

“Were you ever in this part of the world before, Mr. More?” inquired his lordship.

“Never. No; I never was in Wales before.”

“Ah! it’s a wild country. Won’t suit you Leicestershire men. Stiff work for hounds here. Very fair shooting, though, when the woodcocks are over. Some fine old places

worth your notice. Fond of the picturesque, eh? I dare say Eda has told you all about it; she knows more of the country than I do."

"So," thought More, "this is Lady Eda Longvale I have been talking to, is it?"

"Lady Eda," said Pierce turning again to his neighbour, "did not tell me I had the honour of sitting next to Lady Eda, or I might have asked for some agreeable information, instead of talking such—"

"I assure you," interposed Lady Eda, with a smile, "Numidia and New Zealand are much more interesting places to me than Mona Castle and North Wales. Besides—"

"You were determined not to let me find out who you were?"

"Not at all; I had heard so much of you, that it never struck me we were quite strangers."

The utter simplicity of this remark should have completely removed the faintest suspicion of flattery.

“ I am excessively flattered,” said Pierce.

“ Why ?” asked Lady Eda naïvely.

“ That my reputation should have reached—”

“ These uttermost corners of the earth ? Not at all. You forget that your friend Arthur is my cousin.”

“ To be sure !” said Pierce, who had forgotten this simple herald of his fame. “ And through the same medium, I may say *you* have long been only in part a stranger to me. If Arthur has been but half as liberal in his encomiums on one side as he has on the other, we ought to be great friends at once, I think.”

Lady Eda smiled : and bowed with a bow peculiar to herself.

After a time gloves were put on : and Lady Eda, having signalized with a fat dowager on the other side, the gentlemen were left to quench that extraordinary thirst, generally supposed to seize them on this cruel separation of the sexes.

“ How was it, Bellows, you weren’t on the

bench to-day ?” said his lordship to a worldly pillar of the church, who was helping himself to a bumper of claret. “I wanted you there to help me. I trundled off a pack of vagabonds to jail. The country is swarming with them. Money is so deuced scarce—thousands of poor devils are out of employ. I’ll answer for it, if you had been with us we should have given ’em a longer lease than we did.”

“Ah !” said this puffy gentleman, “I agree with your lordship. I am quite of your lordship’s opinion that mendicity must be suppressed. I always make a point of committing all vagrants to jail. It is an ancient, and very constitutional provision for them,” he added with a chuckle.

“It is a serious business,” observed his lordship, “this mons’ous increase of people out of work. I never remember the jails and workhouses so full as they are now. Depend on’t, our poor laws are very much to blame—very much to blame !”

"I agree with you, my lord," said Mr. Bellows; "the increased rates are a grievous burden. Indeed, I always considered parochial relief as a very erroneous system. It encourages idleness, and does more harm than good."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied his lordship: "Dependence on this relief causes a mons'ous deal of indolence and want. It may be very well to give a beggar a shilling now and then, or to help a rascal in distress, but this pretence to charity on a large scale is all stuff and nonsense. What do you think, Gregory? Come, you're a philosopher!"

An elderly gentleman, with a very sweet expression of countenance, to whom this was addressed, answered:

"Doubtless it is a blow to all industry, to maintain one man, at the public cost, in greater comfort than another can by his own efforts maintain himself. And for this reason I am of opinion that workhouses

should afford the smallest possible attraction on its own account, consistent with humanity. But there are cases where starvation would ensue if assistance was withheld: and surely State charity is better able, by a systematic method, to test the claims of an applicant for relief, than promiscuous charity from casual sources. Of course, in some cases, the system may fail, and the individual may give more deservedly; but this, I should say, was not generally the case. I should be inclined to differ with your lordship and Mr. Bellows. For, on the whole, I believe that private charity tends more than State charity to increase mendicity."

"There is very little to choose between them;" said Mr. Bellows in a melancholy tone of voice, sipping his claret. "One system is as obnoxious as the other. Fortunately for us it is not now as it used to be, when all relief to the poor was saddled upon the church."

"Ay," said his lordship, "to be paid out

of the 'fruits and profits' of the church, I think the wording goes. It's a deuced pity the reformation ever cancelled that act. Ha! ha! ha!"

"You forget, my lord, they robbed us of the power to do so any longer, when they seized all our richest endowments. I am sure we feel the pressure of the times as hard as any; and for my part I don't see why the lower class shouldn't bear their share of the burden as well as the church." Here Mr. Bellows emptied his glass with great satisfaction.

"Yet I do not think," said Mr. Gregory, with a good-natured smile, "that they are quite so able to bear it. Don't you think, Sir, the church could more easily do with less claret for instance, than the man, who has eight shillings a week and half-a-dozen children to feed, could do without a quartern loaf? Besides, 'man cannot live by bread alone;' there are two other necessities in the present day; one is, to provide for decency's sake—not to mention the winter's snow—these same

half-dozen children and himself, with sundry yards of fustian, and certain hob-nailed shoes, &c. I doubt whether they have many superfluous comforts to dispose of."

"Ah, but it does not follow, my good Sir," said Mr. Bellows, "because this happens to be a bad harvest, and bread is dear, that clothing should be dear also."

"That may be true," replied Mr. Gregory, "altho' it is an established law, I fancy, in political economy, that the price of the first necessary of life in the long run affects the value of all other commodities. But you, as a clergyman, will not deny that the other necessity which I alluded to, is of more lasting importance still. I mean the education of the poor."

"Pooh ! pooh ! What do you want to educate the poor for ?" said his lordship ; "to make 'em discontented—nothing else, nothing else. It's all stuff and nonsense, Sir, stuff and nonsense !"

"I quite agree with you, my lord," said Bellows. "Education is an extremely dan-

gerous experiment. It is my decided opinion we are not at all in a condition to extend education."

"How, Sir?" said Mr. Gregory. "Can it admit of an argument? It *may* be a question whether dependence or self-dependence is the better condition for the poor—whether they are to think for themselves, or passively to submit to the tutelage of the rich. But if the rich *do* undertake this entire supervision of their interest, shall they acknowledge the obligation to provide for their wants, and then ignore the most important of all wants, their spiritual improvement? It appears to me little better than a state of brute animalism, when the minds of the lowest class in society are so engrossed by the necessity of providing for the maintenance of life, as to be utterly debarred the privilege of learning to what end they were born.

"Can it be doubted that, as the state of its members depends on the health of the human body—so, conversely, the state of the

body politic depends on the condition of its individual members? Can it be denied that the basis of all political well-being must be founded on the ennoblement of the popular character? Depend upon it, Mr. Bellows, it is less ignominious to give with a free will than to be robbed. It is better to yield at discretion than to be conquered without a hope of quarter. It will soon no longer be a question, how much good we are called upon to do; but how much evil we can prevent being done."

"Bah!" exclaimed his lordship, "Gregory's a regular rad—a Job's comforter. I don't see that we are all going to the dogs, as these fellows want to make out. The country never was in a more flourishing state. If we have a good harvest this year, we shall be as well off as ever. Stuff and nonsense about Manchester Leagues and popular education! I don't wish to see a Chartist on the throne, Sir. Here's the Queen, Sir, God bless her! Pass the bottle, Arthur."

“I am sorry to differ with you, Sir,” said Mr. Gregory, as he drank the Queen’s health, “but I cannot entirely shut my eyes to the dark side of things. You know, Sir, in eating our plum-cake we sometimes bite upon a little pebble, which sets our teeth on edge. I was inclined to think with you once ; but I see abuses clamorous for repeal ; I see the effects of this very want of education, which, whether you will or no, is becoming more threatening every day ; I see men, though poor, so intelligent that they *will* think for themselves. And though you deny them the power to act for themselves, yet they soon will make their voices heard ; and those who were deaf before will be the first to tremble then.”

“Goodness me, Mr. Gregory !” said Mr. Bellows, “you are surely not an advocate for universal suffrage, are you ?”

“Ay, to be sure he is,” said his lordship, “and would have the country ruled by boiler-makers and stump orators.”

“Yes,” chimed in Sir Andrew, “and upset all the public institutions in the country, and annihilate the Metropolitan Mud and Dust-hole Company, I’ll be bound for it, he would.”

“No, my lord, I am no Chartist. Nor am I even an advocate for universal suffrage. But I think the dangers of a *little* are only to be overcome by a more extended range of information. Potent liquors administered by spoonfuls soon inebriate, but do not satisfy the thirst. The small end of the wedge—their favourite and hackneyed metaphor—is already inserted, and the hammer is raised to strike. As to our electoral system, an extension of the franchise is imperatively necessary. The system of representation is at all times the true test of the amount of rational liberty which a country enjoys. Can any one examine into ours and not denounce it as unworthy the age we live in? I am opposed to universal suffrage as strongly as any man living, for, while I acknowledge it as an essential ele-

ment of an ideal state of freedom, I lament the impossibility of exercising it in England. And yet, the only real obstacle I recognise to its admission, is the danger of entrusting it in the hands of a people, at present too ignorant and too easily misguided to use, without abusing it."

"Then, in Heaven's name," asked his lordship, "where would you draw the line? Would you give the fellow who stands behind my chair at dinner the same voice in the country as his master, who has several thousand acres at stake? Would you give the d—d rascal (his lordship waxed wroth with the supposition) the power of voting against me, upon whom he depends for his bread and meat, Sir?"

"I should be very sorry, my lord, to give him any power which he wanted the discretion to use in a proper manner; and I do not deny that I think the property qualification is at present low enough; but there is a class of men whose intelligence and information is

far above the standard of intelligence and information in many classes higher than themselves. These men, under the present system, have no nominal qualification whatever. Numerically, they form a large body. Intellectually, they are the most formidable one in the state. Blindly to ignore their claims is foolish and unjust. Wholly to accede to their demands is impossible. All that remains is to temper resistance with discretion; and protract the evil which threatens us, till superior knowledge shall reveal to them the truth, that an identity of interest pervades all classes, and that no real amelioration can accrue to one by an injury inflicted upon another.

“That men of the class I refer to,” continued Mr. Gregory, “are excluded from the privileges of the franchise is by no means the greatest evil. A still worse is, that those whose names are registered as *free* and *independent* electors, those who possess the right to vote, and are supposed to exercise that

right to the best of their discretion, have, after all, but a nominal voice, a *vox et præterea nihil*, in the choice of their representatives. The electoral voice to them is a bell without a tongue—a cheat foisted upon them in place of a reality, a lacquered farthing made to pass for the sterling guinea. It is some years, my lord, since I have meddled in electioneering matters ; but I remember to have seen many a poor man curse the privilege which our constitution boasts of. He cared little that his vote belonged to his employer, and not to himself. But he thought it very hard to be compelled to use that vote contrary, not only to his interest, but also to his principles. I have seen many a poor tradesman ruined because he could not vote *three different ways !*”

“ Very right, very right too ! No doubt he deserved it,” said his lordship. “ Property must and will carry its proper influence. What do such blockheads know about legislating for the country ! And who is so fit to

direct them as their better educated employer ? Besides, Sir, there will be abuses in all human institutions. There's no remedy for this that I see. It always has been so as long as I can remember, and always will be so to the end of the chapter."

"That's begging the question, I think, my lord. Because it always *was* so, is the better reason that it should no longer *be* so. I do not see that abuses, like your wine, my lord, improve with age. I doubt, with all due deference to your assertion, whether the employers are the fittest persons to direct the employed. I doubt whether they are always better educated even ; and if they are, you must admit that the interests of the two classes, however closely allied, are not precisely identical.

"You say there is no remedy for the undue influence exercised by the employer. There is one, at least so I think, and only one. I sincerely trust for the welfare of this country it will not be long before it

becomes the established law of the land. I mean the *ballot*."

At this offensive word, Lord Longvale pished and pshawed with great vehemence and disgust. Bellows drank two glasses of claret in quick succession, pulled down his waistcoat, and brushed his hair on end as if preparing to annihilate Mr. Gregory; but thinking better of his violence—said not a word. Sir Andrew puffed, picked his teeth, and said "Preposterous."

More, who had been gulping down every sentence the old gentleman uttered, felt his eyes suddenly opened to a new arena of action and interest. Politics he had always looked upon as an encumbrance to the *beaux esprits* amongst mankind, which old "fogies" and ambitious young men undertook the direction of, from motives of gain or of pure vanity.

The conversation had only touched upon one or two subjects; but these deeply in-

terested him. The views which, as he thought, Mr. Gregory had so ably expounded, seemed to be exactly what would have been his own views *if* he had ever thought on the matter. He was not the least aware that these problems had been canvassed and solved, and rejected, and re-canvassed again. That strong men had long been straining every nerve, exhausting every argument, to bring about reforms, which day by day were being brought about in the teeth of all dogged prejudices, and short-sighted bigotry, whatever. His heart beat to avenge the wrongs of society ; he was ready at a moment's notice to put his lance in the rest, and charge all the windmills of abuse in the country. He could have rammed Sir Andrew's tooth-pick down his throat, or hit the corpulent parson in the stomach with all the pleasure in the world. He was afraid to speak, he was so excited. He would, however, have said something had not Lord

Longvale stopped him by playfully throwing his napkin at Mr. Arthur's head, to stimulate that young gentleman who had fallen fast asleep, to ring the bell for coffee.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER Pierce had warmed his back at the drawing-room fire, and hovered as near as he dared to the table where the ladies sat at work, he began making up his mind to renew his conversation with Lady Eda ; not selecting her for any particular reason that he was aware of, but none of the other ladies were known to him, and she was, as it were, mistress of the house ; so in fact it became a sort of dutiful civility to speak to her. He hesitated a second or so to think what he should say ; unfortunately, having no brilliant

remark on hand, he delayed just long enough to see Sir Andrew Fitzbun sneak up and lean over her ladyship's chair. Sir Andrew's remarks were made in an under tone of voice, accompanied by such a horrid leer, that Pierce felt quite disgusted with looking at him : while what was most extraordinary, her ladyship seemed to treat him with great kindness, and with very little of that reserve she had shown towards himself. She smiled when he spoke, and appeared to answer him with ease and familiarity.

If Sir Andrew Fitzbun had been some five-and-forty years younger, and had he been without two striking peculiarities, either of which are generally—but united always—fatal to any shadow of sentiment, viz., a bald head, and an undue proportion of rotundity on the anterior view of his figure—Pierce More would have regarded it as the strictest point of honour, not to have approached within earshot of them. But in Pierce's mind, there was not the faintest possibility of reciprocity

on the part of Lady Eda; and he saw no reason to submit to a monopoly of possession. Accordingly he determined, like a wary soldier, to lay siege to the quarter at present disengaged. He had hardly come to this resolution, when a fresh obstacle interposed itself in Arthur Longvale. On Arthur's part there was no such thing as indecision. Boldly marching to the front he captured the nearest chair, and planting it at Lady Eda's side took no notice of Sir Andrew's discomfiture; but calling his cousin by the familiar name of Edie, asked her what horse she had ridden that day.

"The Hornet," she replied: "I like him the best of the two; he has much the most fire, though he is not half so handsome as the Erl-King."

"You must mind what you're at, Edie, or, by Jove! you'll come to grief with the Hornet some day."

"Better be stung by a hornet than be run away with by an Erl-King!" said Sir

Andrew, with one smile for Lady Eda, and another for himself.

“Lor! bless you, Sir Andrew! the Erl-King would never run away with her,” said Arthur; “nor any horse in England I believe. I never saw such a hand in a saddle. There’s no one can hold a candle to you, is there, Edie?”

Lady Eda laughed.

“What have you done with that mare my uncle gave you, that broke the second whip’s neck last season?” continued Arthur.

“I left her in ——shire; it is no use bringing a hunter to Wales. Have you seen my dog, Arthur, since you came down this time? I have got such a handsome creature; Lord —— sent it to me all the way from Scotland. It is a deer-hound, and I don’t know what to call him.”

More thought the discussion probably about to arise on the subject of names, might afford him an excellent opportunity to join the conversation.

“What sort of name do you want, Lady Eda?” he asked. “A romantic name, a fierce name, a tragic name, or a comic name?”

“I don’t know,” answered Lady Eda, suddenly changing her manner from ease to formality.

“Suppose we christen him Juba,” said Arthur, who had in his mind’s eye a pug so called ; and could remember no other dog’s name at the moment.

“Now, really, Arthur, what a name for a deer-hound!” said Lady Eda. “I thought of calling him Oscar or Bruce. But these names are so common. Besides, I want a name with some meaning in it. I intend to make him my faithful page, to follow me wherever I go.”

“Call him Fridolin, then,” suggested More, who was thinking of the “Message to the Forge.”

“I never heard that name before,” said Lady Eda. “Come, Sir Andrew, can’t

you help me to a good name for my dog?"

Pierce thought Lady Eda dull ; and turned on his heel to speak to the young lady who had made eyes at him across the dinner-table. He had not an idea as to who she might be ; but soon found her extremely communicative, and particularly agreeable, because she evidently thought him so. They rattled away, talking of everything that came uppermost ; till insensibly the young lady, with that wonderful ingenuity which young ladies use to turn the conversation upon interesting subjects, introduced the name of Lady Eda. Having gone through all the preliminary bush-beatings before fairly starting the game, she at last, as if by accident, or rather, as if by a sudden thought, which had never crossed her mind before, asked Mr. More whether he thought Lady Eda pretty.

"No, certainly not ; that is—one can't exactly say she is *not* pretty—but—but in

fact, I had not thought much about it. She certainly has a very striking face."

"Well!" said the young lady, "it astonishes me that you don't think her pretty. I should call her really very nice-looking if she was only dark instead of fair."

"It depends a great deal on taste," returned Pierce. "For my part, I don't admire your dark beauties."

The young lady, who was almost as white as an albino, blushed in acknowledgment of the compliment More had unconsciously paid her.

"Certainly," she said, "her eyes are a *leetle* too large for her face; and sometimes she is so *very* pale, that it is quite painful to look at her. I can't say I think her very agreeable."

The last part of this speech was lost on More; for looking up, he found the large blue eyes in question fixed upon him. They were withdrawn not a whit the quicker for his

finding them there. He felt slightly confused.

“I beg your pardon,” he said hurriedly, turning again to the speaker—“not agreeable, did you say? No, he seems the most tedious old bore I ever came across.”

“He—who?” said the albino.

“Why, that blustering old fellow talking to her—didn’t you mean him?”

The young lady changed from white to red, then back again; but made no reply. More saw that he had said something he ought not to have said, and as the vulgar expression goes, that he had “put his foot in it:” but how, or into what, he could not possibly tell. The young lady appeared to be offended past all hopes of reconciliation; and knowing that when the thorn has entered, attempts to extract often drive it farther in, he held his tongue, and was soon relieved from this unpleasant situation by a proposal of Sir Andrew’s to start a round game.

The chairs were placed; and this time Pierce

took good care to secure one next to Lady Eda. The young lady he had been talking to, and the fat dowager, who turned out to be a maiden aunt of Lady Eda's, were unanimously of opinion that pounce commerce at penny lives was the fittest game to be played at. Arthur, however, declared in such sarcastic tones, this shocking gambling would ruin everybody, that the maiden aunt, by name Lady Dorothy, the most good-natured, ready-to-please old soul alive, shook her fat fist at her nephew, and gave in to his wishes without a struggle.

The cards were no sooner dealt, than it became evident Lady Eda did not know an ace from a king. She applied in despair to Mr. Gregory. He assured her his ignorance exceeded her own ; and referred her to Mr. More. Pierce, who had anxiously watched the dilemma, did not wait to be asked. He instantly took Lady Eda under his especial protection ; and promised, as he expressed it, to "conquer or die" in the fight.

Until he had put her in possession of the first principles of the game, she appeared to take no concern in it whatever. But without much difficulty, he soon taught her the complex mysteries of "sequences" and "whole hands." Thus informed, she found to her astonishment that he always threw away his best cards to make her hand. Perceiving that he regularly pursued this method of self-sacrifice, she indignantly remonstrated aloud. Whereupon Sir Andrew pronounced that cheating could not be allowed, and rose to change places with Mr. More. This gentleman, however, showed no intention of moving; and Lady Eda, saying that if Mr. More would promise not to cheat again, there was no reason why he should go away, the game went on as well as before.

It happened that Pierce played with great luck. But since he had been able to give only his advice, and not his cards, to his *protégée*, she on the contrary had been very unfortunate. Only three persons remained "alive."

These were Lady Eda, the white young lady, and Pierce. The first round proved fatal to Lady Eda. More then declared, with much sincerity, he had no farther interest in the game—she being ‘dead;’ and insisted upon her accepting one of his lives. This she took; much to the annoyance of her opponent; for, to judge from the expression of the albino’s countenance, she was engaging in this mimic warfare with feelings akin to real animosity. Her glances were frequently directed towards the little china basin containing the pool; but, although she unquestionably was animated by the hopes of transferring its contents to her pocket, we venture to say the genius of her sex will detect deeper motives for her anxiety, than the innocent one of augmenting her pin-money by the enormous sum of three shillings and sixpence.

Nothing would have grieved Lady Eda so much as the thought of annoying another person; but she had now thoroughly learned

the game, and was so roused by the excitement of the last round, that she entirely overlooked the possibility of being a stumbling-block, to her opponent, and, forgetting her natural reserve, clapped her little hands in true enjoyment of the fun.

Before looking at his own hand, Pierce examined the faces of both the other players. That of the white young lady beamed with delight ; Lady Eda's fell with despair. He was determined to be as good as his word, and "die or conquer" in the cause he had espoused. We grieve to relate it, but, in spite of all his promises to the contrary, he resolved, if his purposes were not to be carried by fair means, basely to resort to strategy. With this intention, he let fall his pocket-handkerchief, and in stooping to pick it up, took the opportunity to overlook her ladyship's hand. A glance told him exactly how it was. The very card he happened to hold. He threw it down, and Lady Eda pounced upon it with an exclamation

of triumph. Pierce was now the victim, and Lady Eda, still unsuspecting of the plot, insisted on his taking back the life that rightly belonged to him. The generosity of this offer had an immediate effect on the temper of the white young lady, who asserted that the game could not be prolonged unless fairly played out. Pierce's obstinate refusal slightly pacified her, but her indignation instantly returned when he claimed the right to advise Lady Eda as a looker-on. Without noticing the tosses of the head across the table, he pulled his chair close to that of his *protégée*; and, by dint of taking the cards from her hand twenty times in a minute and as often replacing them, effected such excellent changes, that upon the last show she was the winner by many pips.

Her skilful adviser then politely emptied the pool on to the table before the winner. She wanted to share it with the white young lady. This generous proposal, however, was received with more tosses of the head, and

Lady Eda found herself obliged to take the whole three shillings and sixpence ; saying, as she did so, that she felt like a thief running away with her gains.

When Lady Eda wished Pierce good-night, she expressed a hope that Arthur paid proper attention to his comforts. It was Arthur's duty, she said, to take care of the gentlemen. If Mr. More liked to see the wonders of the castle to-morrow, she would be his *cicerone* for the occasion.

The next day, receiving no intelligence from Winter, Pierce wrote to express his anxiety to see him. In his letter he stated how Bellerby had positively declined to lend money ; and begged Winter to hasten to Mona, that he might as soon as possible have the benefit of his advice. He passed a few gossiping comments on the party there assembled ; and in consideration of Winter's predilection for female society, offered to his notice as an inducement for his early arrival, a young

lady both fair and witty whom he thought would in every respect suit his taste.

Pierce promised that Winter should find no rival in him ; as notwithstanding the excellent first impression he was sure he had created, unfortunately he had for ever lost himself in her good graces by some shocking remark about the Porpoise (Sir Andrew was universally known by this *soubriquet*), who to his dismay turned out at breakfast next morning to be no other than the young lady's father.

He concluded with a list of the guests, making mention of Mr. Gregory in particular as having agreeably surprised him, after Arthur's description. The only name he omitted was that of Lady Eda. The omission was not accidental. Pierce felt no wish to prepossess Winter in her favour.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE two or three days following that of More's arrival, passed without the occurrence of any of those startling incidents which, according to some romance writers of the period, attend the footsteps of all heroes and heroines throughout life. We do not pretend to say that his career was not a trifle more eventful than ordinary. The fact of its appearing so to us, is the best pretext we can assign for the prominent position he occupies throughout this narrative. But we believe that any person endowed with a similar disposition and equal means of pur-

suing its bent, could, if he spoke truthfully, relate a history far more wonderful than the one, dear reader, you are now perusing.

The eventfulness of Mr. More's life, was rather the eventfulness arising from trifling than from great events. It was the eventfulness of small things acting upon an impressible nature. The causes were everyday causes, but the effects were Seventh-day results. This it is which makes some men great, some insignificant. A trifle is nothing but a trifle to this man, while to that it is a pregnant occasion.

Opportunities—events—have to be assimilated by the organs of the mind for its growth—precisely as food has to be assimilated by the organs of the body.

Life—from its beginning to its end—is but an assimilating process. A process by which the chyle of this world's business and pleasure, of its sorrows and joys, is transformed into the blood of a purer, Heavenlier life.

All experience teaches that God delights in an *active* creation.

As the functions of an intricate organization sustain material life—and enable *it* to work out its own preservation:—so the mysterious powers of the soul are given to minister to the growth of the spiritual Life—to enable IT “to work out its own salvation.”

The materials are liberally supplied us—to fashion according to our good or evil will. To use, or to abuse them.

Those MATERIALS are—EVENTS.

Greatness, or goodness — (for they are convertible terms—since there is no greatness without goodness—no goodness without greatness) requires not for its manifestation glaring events. Quiet endurance transcends glittering action. The modest bud precedes the flower.

In this bountiful distribution there is no unjust caprice. *All* may be *great* : *for all* may be *good*. All may be happy : for there is no real happiness, but in goodness. *All may*

conquer difficulties—the *ordained hot-beds of moral growth*:—all may cultivate to the utmost the talent entrusted to them.

The Peasant and the Peer—Newton and the Kaffir—have, in truth, the same field before them:—the same plant to cultivate—the same harvest to reap!

Trifling therefore, though be many of the incidents we have to relate, ‘*Hæ nugæ seria ducunt*’—with natures like Pierce’s these trifles lead to serious results. Pierce More is not our *hero*: we have none; we could not paint one; for, honestly, we never yet met one. The delineation of a natural character is all we aim at: at this stage of its progress—vacillating, foolish, and uncertain—by degrees acquiring strength; growing more like a hero in reality, as he departs from the vision of romance.

At the termination of these two or three days, Pierce found himself comfortably installed at Mona Castle. He had become used to its inmates, and they had become used to

him. Though by temper reserved and retiring, he had lived long enough with society to be perfectly at his ease when in it. Slow in forming attachments, he nevertheless was always ready to meet the advances of others. No one was more sure to be popular where he liked; but he took no pains to please those with whom he could not sympathize. He cared as little as men have a right to care for general popularity — he was too self-relying for this—and had no regard for the many whom he frequently met in search of it. Of an impulsive nature, he was apt to misconstrue manner, attributing to sincerity the polish of outward behaviour, and mistaking for absence of all feeling the simple result of shyness, or the equally common fault of a bashful pride. Such a disposition led him to form hasty conclusions, which, as they resulted in sudden prepossessions or antipathies, were often as injurious to himself as they were unjust to others.

Lady Eda's manner to him on the first

evening of his introduction, made it more than probable that, had he never seen her again, he would soon have forgotten, or at all events only have remembered her, as a haughty young lady hardly worth the trouble it would have cost to know her better. The short acquaintance of three days had so altered his opinion, that he now looked upon her as amiable, accomplished, and interesting. The variety in her character was a charm rather than a fault — in goodness she appeared always consistent. Her abruptness of manner he now saw, to be the consequence partly of modesty, and partly of an honest aversion to feign an interest when she felt none. Besides these qualities, she possessed much sensibility which a natural pride seldom permitted her to discover; and a temper that would have been quick, had it not been under perpetual control. There were points in her character, which Pierce was for the present, at a loss to interpret, but was better able to comprehend

when he sometime afterwards heard from her own mouth the peculiarities of her education and daily mode of life.

Her mother had died when she was a child. Her father, who devoted the chief of his time to agricultural pursuits and field sports, left the direction of her education almost entirely to her own caprice: only permitting the interference of his sister Lady Dorothy, when the qualifications of a new governess were beyond the limits of his judgment to decide upon. Till she was seventeen years of age (she had just completed her eighteenth year) Lord Longvale had carefully excluded her from all society but that of the neighbourhood. He had always thought it a part of his duties as an hereditary statesman to reside in London during the Session of Parliament. For several months, therefore, in every year, his daughter was left sole mistress and sole occupant of Mona Castle. At these times—it was for the most part in the summer months—Lady Eda passed her existence in the indulgence

of occupations which contributed alone to her pleasure, without those ordinary restrictions calculated to operate for her improvement.

Nothing could have been more dangerous to her future welfare than this ill-judged absence of restraint. The worst consequences might have been apprehended from so lax a system of education. Fortunately, her nature was proof against the trial. Her disposition was too pure to be spoiled. Those affections which might have perished for want of proper objects on which to bestow them, were lavished with all the fondness of a child's heart upon her only playmates—her dogs and pony. The governess who instructed her, the servants who attended upon her, the village poor who received her bounties, all loved her. Evil was a word she read in books, but this was her only acquaintance with it. How anybody could be bad, when she saw no inducement to be anything but good, was a problem that perplexed her.

By degrees—as the child became the woman, and the mind expanded with the

maturing frame—the scamper with dogs and pony over the wide moorlands, surrounding the castle, was more frequently forsaken for the hidden treasures of the dusty book-case. The bent of her intuitive taste guided her in her choice of authors. Amongst her favourites, those who ranked highest were Scott, Schiller, Longfellow, and Keble, and especially the saint-like Fenelon. As to voyages and travels, there were hardly any so dull as not to please her. With the magic aid of these companions she wandered over the whole of that globe one inch of which, beyond her father's domains, she had made up her mind never to set foot on. She took it for granted that the rest of her life would pass as it had begun, and was content to look at men and things through the refracting prism of romance.

Gradually the contemplation of the characters she read of, turned her thoughts to the examination of her own. She was at first annoyed at the suspicion of certain

faults in herself, which she had learnt to deprecate in others. On closer inspection, she was both grieved and surprised to find these faults actually existing. Discovering the cause, she resolutely determined to counteract it. The long habit of having no wish thwarted was the secret of a slight impatience, which, when not instantly checked by the gratification of her whims, was frequently attended with hastiness of temper. She saw these dangers; and many times—when trifles crossed her will, when servants came not the instant of her beck, when toys or baubles were lost or broken, when passing illness (or any such little evil) made her fretful, when absorbing interest in some romantic plot incited her to devour a work of fiction—the rising temper, the morbid curiosity were restrained, the novel laid aside—and turning to the well-scored pages of her mother's Bible, she read of Him who was holy on earth, and thought the while how wicked she had been.

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE days had sufficed to a quick observer like More to discover many of the peculiarities in Lady Eda's character. But many remained yet to be revealed. Such women as Miss Fitzbun were as familiar to him as the look of his own face. An Eda Longvale he had never met with before. This concrete form seemed almost made to fit the outline of his ideal creation. In soul he was an artist; here he had found a model. In mind, right worthy of his anatomizing. In form—he had half-doubted once—now—

but no matter; we must not betray secrets out of place—we know he was an impetuous young gentleman—and what are his three-day-impressions worth? In all ordinary possibility he might change his mind at the end of another three days. He has plenty of time to study his model. Arthur declares he shall not go for a month; and all this time he has to watch trifles, and talk seriously—two certain methods of probing the minds of men and women.

“Do you live upon air, Mr. More?” Lady Eda one day asked him after luncheon. “You eat no breakfast, no luncheon, no dinner. I shall begin to think Mona does not suit your health before long?”

“You exaggerate a little, Lady Eda. I eat both breakfast and dinner. I don’t eat luncheon, because I am better without it.”

“In what sense better without it?”

“In every sense. I find it suits my health; and my spirits depend on my health;

therefore I am the better for abstemiousness."

"If it does harm to your health to eat luncheon, you are quite right to do without it; but I can't see any other reason for eating so little. I believe your love of doing as others do—don't you remember telling me the first night you came that you always liked to do as other people do?—I think it must be that feeling which has made you imitate Mr. Gregory. He is even more abstemious than yourself. His breakfast is a crust of bread and a glass of water."

"I confess my admiration for Mr. Gregory would lead me to imitate him in most things, and his example has perhaps had its effect upon me even in this matter. Do you not think all self-denial, however trifling, has a lasting result on the mind?"

"Surely you do not call it an act of self-denial to eat no pudding at dinner? If I thought so, I never would touch pudding again; but as I should not miss it in the

least, it would be no sacrifice on my part to go without."

"Yes," said More, smiling, "but all people have not the same disrespect for pudding that you have. Think you that old Fitzbun, for instance, would go without his pudding for any mortal consideration whatever? Think you that he could resist any dainty dish that would provoke the grossness of his pampered appetite? And if he could not resist this trifling temptation, how think you he could resist a greater?"

"Of course," said Lady Eda, "I abominate the idea of indulging one's appetite to excess—nothing can be more revolting—yet where there is no danger of doing so, I think we ought to be thankful for all the blessings that are given us, and use them accordingly. If we are to sacrifice every convivial pleasure from the fear of abusing it, where are we to draw the line of our concession? We may starve ourselves to death."

"It is, I own, difficult to define the limit,

though I expect the number of deaths, produced by voluntary starvation, would hardly equal those produced by intemperance. There can be, I think, no doubt of the benefit to be derived from fasting. Not that I would have it a mere formal exercise, to be evaded surreptitiously; or causing self-commendation in the rigour of its observance. Those only should practise it, who voluntarily did so for the sake of self-denial, and mortification. If any question the mortification of such a custom, let them sit down to a good dinner when hungry, and, without the approval of a single being except their own conscience, try to fast; they will be astonished to find how despicably weak is the moral constraint they hold upon themselves. The merit of resisting temptation, is seldom in proportion to the magnitude of the evil resisted. I am convinced that every negation to self-indulgence, is a step towards self-culture. Besides this, I, for one, have too

little of the *spiritual* about me, as it is. These carnivorous propensities make me shudder at myself."

Such opinions were not very consistent with those Mr. Pierce held a few days before, when about to dine at his club. Then, he was surrounded by companions whose society did not inspire such thoughts. It is astonishing what a purifying influence the intercourse with purity itself will have !

"There is truth in what you say," answered Lady Eda : "I am indebted to you for the hint."

"And, to change the subject of puddings, will perhaps discharge the debt by allowing me to look at your drawing."

"Most gladly ; I so want you to see it, and to give me some more hints. I think you will find one or two of the figures improved since yesterday."

Pierce set the drawing on a chair, and examined it carefully. The subject was taken from Schiller's "Robbers:" but the scene

was an imaginary one; in which the two brothers allegorically represented nobility and baseness. Hovering above them was Amalia, about to place a wreath on the head of the younger.

As he looked into the drawing, Pierce observed that the head of Karl had been altered; and, as it struck him, now bore a slight resemblance to himself. The idea made his heart beat quicker.

"It is better, don't you think?" said Lady Eda.

"No, it is still very much out of proportion. Amalia's face is not sufficiently foreshortened, and Karl's features are not symmetrical enough."

"Dear, how tiresome you are!" said Lady Eda playfully. "I shall have to rub it all out again, for the fiftieth time."

"Not for the world. It is charming on the whole."

"Oh, but I will rub it out. Where's Arthur?" He was standing behind her

chair. "Arthur! lend me your pocket handkerchief to rub the chalk out."

"It isn't as clean as it might be," said her cousin; "but I'll fetch one in a minute." And away he ran.

"He is such a good creature!" said Lady Eda: and then she told More a story about his having gone out one night in winter to wait for wild fowl. And described how it came on to freeze and snow; and how the boy who went with him to hold his dog, was nearly starved with cold; and how Arthur, the noble-hearted fellow, having no great coat or plaid, pulled off his shooting coat to wrap the boy in; and then sat till morning with the endurance of an Indian; shooting ducks in his shirt sleeves. She was so eloquent in his praise, that Pierce wished she had known what wonderful adventures he had had, and might think as well of him, as she did of Arthur. He could not deny in his own mind that Arthur was a very noble fellow; yet consoled himself with the reflection that

his friend was more manly than intellectual.

“So you don’t think your namesake, Karl Moor, good-looking enough. I think he is very handsome. It is a style of face I admire.”

“There,” said Longvale, as he came back with one of his best cambric handkerchiefs in hand, “will that do for you?”

“Yes, beautifully,” and she began dusting away till the drawing was effaced.

“What are you going to do to-day, Eda?” inquired Arthur.

“I am going to draw, don’t you see?”

“You’re always drawing now. I wanted you to come for a gallop. The Hornet will be so fresh, you won’t be able to ride him in a day or two.”

“Oh, yes I shall.”

“Then will you come out now?”

“No; I wish you would go away and not bother.”

“ Well, Eda, you might as well speak civilly to a ‘*feller*.’ Dash it !”

Wherewith Mr. Longvale walked away offended.

“ Here, Arthur, stop, I didn’t mean—” but he was gone. “ Foolish boy !” said Lady Eda. “ Mr. More, will you put up the drawing ? I am going out riding.” And Pierce was left to make the most of a fit of jealousy.

To throw him over he thought in that unceremonious way was uncivil ; but to show so marked a preference for Arthur Longvale’s company, was, to say the least of it, unbecoming. Never for a moment reflecting that he monopolised Lady Eda’s society for two thirds of the day, and that her cousin had as much right to be civil to her as any one else—he overlooked Arthur’s good-nature in never putting himself in the way, forgot the kindness of the girl’s disposition, and ended by making reflections, not very favourable to any one concerned.

In the comparisons he drew between himself and Arthur, he pictured the latter as a handsome, good-natured, irresistible eldest son ; himself—an ill-tempered, sensitive, hard-featured wretch with prospects of pecuniary embarrassments for life. In this humour he banged down the chalk box, determining never to look over her drawings again ; and taking his hat, went for a long walk, where no doubt he enjoyed many pleasant thoughts, entirely to himself.

At dinner that day he did not give his arm to Eda as usual, but offered it instead to Miss Fitzbun, to whom he made desperate love all through the first course. Arthur sat next to his cousin, and was in high spirits. Lady Eda laughed at his honest jokes, and appeared to be much more amused at them than ever she was at his own prosy lectures. With all his pretended indifference, Pierce could not help, now and then, stealing a glance at the couple opposite : whenever he did so, it was sure to happen by

some extraordinary fatality, that Lady Eda was looking at him. On these occasions he felt awkward and confused. Her ladyship did not appear the least so. He eat no dinner, but drank a great deal of wine ; till he felt flushed and excited. When the ladies were gone, he became so impatient to follow them, that he could not sit still for a minute at a stretch. Several times he tried to make a move ; but was disappointed and disgusted because old Fitzbun had pinned Mr. Gregory in a button-hole conversation. Lord Longvale seemed to be amused by it too.

“ Pray, Sir,” said Sir Andrew, “ what then is your opinion on these matters ? ” in a tone which signified that he had driven Mr. Gregory to a corner at last.

“ If by religion,” answered Mr. Gregory, “ you mean to what *sect* I belong, I answer none.”

“ No religion, Mr. Gregory ! good Heavens ! then you must be an atheist ! ” .

“ That, Sir Andrew, does not follow. My

own priest tells me what is right, and what is wrong."

"Ah! I see, you keep a chaplain. Is he a clever man? that is, are you sure he is competent to direct you in the right path? And his salary, if I might be so inquisitive, what is that Mr. Gregory?"

"His services are entirely disinterested. As to his talents, I cannot question them, for I never knew his advice to be misplaced, or his judgment to err."

"Really an invaluable friend. I have made inquiries in all directions for such a person to educate my children."

"You need not have given yourself that trouble. In the first place, my adviser is not of this world; and—"

"Good Heavens! you alarm me; nothing supernatural, I hope."

"Nothing unusual; your children, I do not doubt, are each supplied with such an instructor, and you yourself possess one also: if, at least, you have not destroyed him."

“Destroyed him ! Bless me, Sir, what do you mean ? I destroy my instructor ! really—”

“It is a fact, Sir Andrew, I assure you, that your children are blest with the best of all instructors.”

“Since you seem to know more of my own family affairs than I do myself, will you be good enough to tell me the names of these invisible advisers ?”

“That is not easy ; for although each of your children has its own adviser, yet these advisers are of like nature and name. People who are acquainted with them have given them different names. I know not which is the most correct, but that little signifies as—”

“Their names, Sir, their names.”

“Are by some called Conscience, by others Reason, by others Common Sense.”

“Ah ! now I understand you. Very good ; very good. But do you really think, Mr. Gregory, that a man’s conscience will teach

all that is necessary for him to know, in a moral sense?"

"Not entirely, but what is fundamentally right and wrong, that will it teach him."

"And what, Sir, do you mean by fundamentally right and wrong?"

"Our duty to God, and our duty to man. This, I believe, was a law taught by Zoroaster and Confucius, long before it was perfected by the Divine Founder of the Christian religion."

"This is all very correct and proper, and I may say astonishing for a man without a religion. But, Sir, had you never heard these precepts preached, they would not have been likely to enter your head."

"That, Sir Andrew, is a matter of opinion. Ideas may, as you and other philosophers have thought, be solely derived through induction from the senses. There may also be some truth in the theories of Kant, and Bishop Berkeley. You will not deny that many nations, who have never had the advantage you speak of, do nevertheless found their

laws of morality upon principles fundamentally the same as ours. They seem to have discovered the difference between right and wrong without the assistance of others."

"Excuse me, I doubt whether they have made that discovery. They are always at war with their neighbours ; and what is more, Sir, they eat them when they catch them. Do you call that Christian-like behaviour? What has conscience done for such ruffians as these?"

"A great deal, though not everything. I admitted that conscience would not teach men all that is necessary for them to know ; but it has taught them as much as it has taught us. It has taught them to believe in a Supreme Being ; and it has taught them to make such laws as conduce to the preservation of order and virtue in their relations as man to man. That they are nearly always at war with their neighbours, is no proof to the contrary ; for in that respect they are no worse than the most civilized nations. As to

the custom of eating one another ; that, Sir Andrew, is a matter of taste. Cannibalism is a barbarous mistake ; but inasmuch as it does not signify a straw, what becomes of the material part of a man when he is dead, I cannot call it a sin to eat him either cooked or raw."

"Horrible, quite horrible !" said Sir Andrew. "Do give me a glass of sherry ; I feel quite overcome."

Mr. Gregory laughed at the effect of his playful banter ; and his lordship did the same. More's patience ended with the conversation ; he rose and sought the company of Lady Eda in the next room.

CHAPTER XV.

SHE was sitting by herself and hardly noticed his approach. He thought there was an unusual chilliness in her answers. He had intended to tease her a little. His intention changed. He spoke to her in a melancholy tone of voice ; but it produced no effect. He altered his tone to a gay and flippant pitch. Even this was unobserved. He talked of liking and disliking, and hinted that some persons were very capricious. Lady Eda thought so too.

“Worse,” he said, “than caprice was a

sort of deceitfulness in some people's manner, which led others to suppose they were liked when they were not cared for."

"It was very wrong," she thought.

He was of opinion that "one could always judge by appearance whether people were worth liking or not."

"Yes, perhaps so."

"And when he was prepossessed in a person's favour, he took pains to know them."

"Yes, she did so too; but it required a long time really to know a person; some people thought they could know you in a week, and took violent fancies that were foolish in the extreme!"

"Ah! but then he had met people who were so reserved it was impossible ever to know them. Again some persons though perfectly unreserved one day, would let you down the next, and positively snub you."

"They might do this to try them, on—"

"On what?" he asked.

“She had forgotten what she was going to say. By the way, she wanted to ask, did he belong to any profession?”

“No.”

“It was a pity with his talents; he was the very person to succeed in a profession; the Bar for instance.”

“It was too hard work: he had just money enough to be idle.”

“It was a misfortune! Why wasn’t he in Parliament? it would be the very thing for him.”

“He had no ambition, and was thankful for it. It was impossible for any ambitious man to be happy.”

“Was he happy?”

“Perhaps he was, perhaps he wasn’t.”

“She thought he wanted strength of purpose; that he had ambition she was sure; and plenty of energy too, but she feared when his aim was won, he cared no more for the object.”

A slight blush. More’s heart beat.

“ Oh ! how could she be so deceived ! There was no man living of more resolute purpose. If she only knew how he longed for one particular thing—how he would die to win it, and die if need be, to cherish it.”

“ She did not know what that could possibly be.”

“ Oh, yes ! she knew well enough.” For a moment he looked steadfastly into her eyes : she looked away to her work. “ She knew,” he said, “ what that one thing was ; and if she would, she could tell him whether he had a chance of winning it or not.”

“ No she couldn’t.”

She moved to go.

“ Why did she want to go ?”

“ She wanted her work.”

“ He would fetch it. Would she be less reserved in future ? She told Fitzbun, the old fool, everything ; why would she not speak about herself to him ?”

“ The case was so very different ; one

could not be as familiar with a young person as with an old."

"Was she not familiar with Arthur?"

"She had a right to be familiar with whom she pleased, without asking Mr. More's permission," a little angrily: then more kindly, "Arthur was her cousin."

Pierce "supposed his idea of reserve was different from hers? He could explain his meaning better in writing than by word of mouth."

"He might do as he pleased."

Lady Eda began arranging a sprig of verberna in her waist-band.

"What sweet stuff that is," he said; pinching one of the leaves between his fingers, as the sprig stuck in her girdle.

"Upon my word, Mr. More, you are very cool!" and she got up and left him.

Presently Arthur entered, and went to Lady Eda. She smiled sweetly on him. He sat down, and she gave him some of her work to do.

“What a jolly ride we had to-day, Eda, hadn’t we?”

“Yes, charming! do let us go every day while the weather is so fine.”

She had promised to get up a picnic some day: now every day was to be spent riding with Arthur! It was evident that he, Pierce, had been making an ass of himself. The sherry had got into his head. He hated Longvale. Lady Eda was a flirt! He should go to London the next day. The sooner he cut the whole concern the better.

He gnashed his teeth, and kept a fixed stare on Lady Eda’s face. She looked up and seemed unable to take her eyes away from his. She appeared sad. The next minute a hearty laugh at one of Arthur’s jokes. This was unbearable: he dashed from the room, and went to the hall-door for air. The rain was falling in pailfuls. He wanted cooling; and it was highly romantic to get wet in full dress, on a dark

night, without a hat on. He folded his arms, and walked with tragic strides along the terrace, looking gloomily into the abyss of the pitch-dark dell, where the stream leaped in torrents below. The night being hot, the drawing-room window was open. The light streamed from the room, and showed the rain-drops glittering in its rays. Was she laughing at Longvale's jokes now? Or had it been only to annoy him that she laughed? His vanity persuaded him it was only done to annoy him. He would look in at the window. But how to reach it? It was twenty feet from the ground. He went beneath to listen, and could only hear a confusion of voices. He looked up. There was a trellis-work for creepers to climb by. Would it bear him? He tried. It was tolerably strong, but bent a good deal. What if he fell, and broke his neck! Pshaw! so much the better! Up he went; it was dangerous work; the climbing roses tore his hands with thorns, he had a hard

job to get a footing. Now and then a nail came out of the mortar, and crack went the loosened woodwork. His arms were beginning to ache. If he fell, 'twould be certain death! Five minutes ago, he had thoughts of jumping into the abyss; he clung to the trellis, now, till his whole frame shook, and the sweat stood on his forehead. One more effort, another pull, his hand is on the window-sill, all the danger forgotten, and his whole being is intent on the scene within.

The elders are at their whist table. His lordship and Lady Dorothy are partners against Mr. Gregory and the rector. Miss Fitzbun is at the piano, playing a *morceau*! Arthur has some worsted work in his hand, and Eda is leaning over him, telling him how it is to be done. Sir Andrew is leering at Lady Eda, standing beside her, looking eminently ridiculous, and feeling conscious that he is so.

"Surely," thought Pierce, "Arthur is not

so stupid as to need this teaching, nor need they sit so very close together." She put her hand on his shoulder, and leaned over him to watch his work; Pierce breathed more freely when she took it off. Now she laughed. Oh, if he only knew at what! He did not like to listen; it was ungentlemanlike. Did he by accident hear his own name? Yes, Arthur smiled, and said: "Poor Pierce!" So they were laughing at him! He was an object of pity and of ridicule! They should smart for this.

Longvale looked at some jewellery fastened round her neck by a large old-fashioned chain. It was the only ornament she ever wore. He spoke of it as the "Longvale Crucifix," and asked her to give it to him. She refused. He asked why. "She must have told him fifty times, that she could not part with it; she never could permit it to leave the family." Arthur dropped his voice, so that Pierce heard neither question nor answer. He saw Lady

Eda change colour, and concluding that it was all over with *him*, scrambled down rather quicker than he had scrambled up.

Before going to bed that night, a brief cross-examination convinced him that, as he expected, he had acted upon the whole very like a fool. What business had he to be in love with Lady Eda. In love with Lady Eda! Was he in love with her? Why, she was a thousand times too good for *him*. It was absurd to suppose a girl like her—the most accomplished, most graceful, most fascinating creature he had ever seen—should care for *him*. Besides, if she did, had he no sense of honour? Would he, in the selfishness of his own passion, subject her—who had been brought up in a palace of luxury, who had a right to expect a husband in every way his superior—to the liabilities of his own impoverished state? Alas! alas! if he had not ruined himself! Had he only been heir to a title and £50,000 a-year, what

a glorious thing to have laid all at her feet ! This, however was a dream ; it was not to be ; the sooner he made up his mind to the alternative, the better. He would forget her.

Forget her ? was he *ever* to forget her ?

The same day he got a letter from Winter, saying that he had been unwell, and prevented on this occasion from coming to Mona. He had, however, much to tell More with regard to money matters ; and as he should pass through Conway on his way to Ireland, whither the death of a near relative summoned him, he would meet Pierce there at an early hour the day after he received this letter.

“ So,” thought Pierce, “ here the affair will die a natural death.” Not that this was at all a consoling reflection. On the contrary, he felt very wretched and discontented. “ He was the most unlucky devil in the world ! A positive football for fortune to kick at ! What was the use of these beautiful

creatures, if they were only to tantalize and disappoint men? He never wanted to meet her. He never wanted to fall in love with her ; but how could he help it ? Anybody would have fallen in love with her ! Nobody could have helped it. Of course she wished to marry Arthur, that was natural enough. All women valued marriage only so far as it gave them position in the world. They were mighty romantic in their notions of love, but practically they had not half the sentiment men had. There was not one woman in the world who married for love alone !”

Such was his mood when he accidentally met Arthur Longvale. He told him he had heard from Winter, who had been ill, and could not come to Mona. He said he was obliged to meet him upon important business ; and should leave Mona early the next morning.

Arthur was sorry he was obliged to go away, but insisted on his coming back after seeing Winter.

“No, he must go on to town.”

“Oh! what nonsense! What did he want to go for? Had he got tired of Mona? What was the matter? He had not quarrelled with Eda, had he?”

“With Lady Eda? what an idea! why should he quarrel with her?”

Arthur “could not say; he was sure he saw no reason why they should quarrel: on the contrary, they seemed to be uncommon good friends. He had never seen Eda get so thick—thus he expressed himself—with any one before, in so short a time.”

More “did not know why he should think that. He did not know that they were particularly good friends. He hoped she didn’t *dislike* him, for he would confess he liked her very much, that was, he thought her a very nice girl—in fact, as nice a girl as he knew.”

“Ah! she was a one—er, wasn’t she? He, Arthur, didn’t know where to look for another like her. By George! the fellow

that landed her would be a lucky chap. He believed Pierce had as good a chance as any child of his acquaintance."

"Pshaw! what nonsense! It was plain enough that Arthur was the happy man."

"He, Arthur! don't tell him! He wasn't such a fool as he looked. Anybody could see with half an eye that Pierce had nothing to do but to go in and win."

"Ah! that was just like Arthur, the most good-natured fellow he had ever met. Well, whichever way it was, he would leave the coast clear, and then he advised him to do his best."

"If he must go, he must; but he could tell Pierce that Edie was not in the habit of looking at a fellow as a cat watches a mouse; yet so she always watched him. Why, hang it! wasn't she everlastingly playing duets with him? and hadn't he heard Eda say that Pierce was as good as a professional? Which, dash it! he must see was *rayther* partial than other-

wise. See how she talked to him ! Wasn't it a first-rate sign when women talked so ? In fact, there could be no doubt he was as right as a walking-stick, if he would only go in and say how it was."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the afternoon, the two went out riding, talking all the time of nothing but Eda; encouraging each other, and disparaging themselves, just in proportion as each hoped he might be mistaken in the end.

When they came home, it was nearly dusk. Arthur took the horses to the stables. Pierce went to the long drawing-room. There were no lights in the room. He could just see who was present. Lady Dorothy was dozing in an arm-chair. Mr.

Gregory was in another, chatting with Lady Eda. Nobody else was there. Mr. Gregory and Lady Eda were talking about books. It was a subject which interested More, and he always liked to listen to Mr. Gregory ; but he heartily wished the old gentleman had been out of the way now, for he wanted to have a word with Lady Eda alone. However, there was nothing for it but to join in the conversation.

“If you were asked, Mr. Gregory,” said Lady Eda, “to name your favourite author, who should you say ?”

“That, Lady Eda, is a very difficult question to answer. To choose a best where there are so many good, is almost impossible.”

“I thought you did not much admire modern literature.”

“Were you not alluding to ancient as well as modern ?”

“No. It was more with reference to the literature of the day that I asked. Knowing

you had so few favourites amongst them, I thought you could name the one you liked best."

"As to my favourites, they are indeed few ; but those few I respect sincerely. Indeed, I consider their works as important studies for the present generation as those ancient classics whose wisdom has been borrowed and adapted to later ages. On the whole, we have much cause to rejoice in the literature of the present day. As compared with that belonging to the commencement of the last century, it is inferior in brilliancy of wit and humour, but it is incomparably superior to it in the earnestness of its purpose, as well as in the morality of its tone. There are, I confess, some writers who paint no passions but such as disgrace our nature ; who diffuse unhappiness by engendering morbid sentiments ; and who sow the seeds of discontent by overwrought illustrations of misery and distress ; such are the

exception. They are mostly of inferior or unhealthy minds ; or are men compelled to earn their daily bread, by pandering to a vicious taste."

"But," said Lady Eda, "though I am not fond of reading books filled with horrors, don't you think they are useful in their way as moral lessons? Don't you think we ought to be reminded of our insecurity, I mean, the dangers which beset us, and which, if we did not see their terrible results, we might fall into? Sometimes the sight of sin and suffering brings us painfully to a sense of our own condition, and our own ingratitude to God for preserving us from a similar fate."

"What you say is partly true. But they are very few in this world, Lady Eda, so unacquainted with sin and its results as you are. Were all readers equally in the dark, I would admit your hypothesis to be wholly true. But I fear the world is

too familiar with guilt and horrors already.
You have not forgotten Pope's lines on vice :

“ ‘ Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.’ ”

Be assured the market is over-stocked with vice. It is not enough to be taught, even if we do not already know it, that vice is hateful. We need, far more, instruction in the paths of virtue. The contemplation of good is more improving than the contemplation of evil.”

“ Yet how strange it is,” said More, “ that, as a general rule, books of horrors should be more interesting than so-called ‘ good books.’ This seems to be one of many proofs of the prevalence of evil in our dispositions. Is it not that we want more inducement to seek after truth than truth in the abstract offers as the reward of our search ?”

“ There,” said Mr. Gregory, “ you have started serious problems, which we have no

time to discuss now. I do not admit that the history of virtue is less interesting than the history of vice ; and what—”

“ Then how do you account,” said Lady Eda, “ for the preference one gives to heart-rending stories ? And what means that sort of feeling which, when you are looking for a book to read and lay your hand on a volume of sermons, makes you put it hastily on one side, and then feel ashamed at your distaste for such serious reading ?”

“ What does it mean ? It means that the subjects they treat of, which demand all the force of creative energy, are rendered nauseous by feeble platitudes, narrow-minded views, debasing prospects of human nature, derogatory notions of God, bigotry, want of charity, intolerance, and all that our reason and faith alike rebel against. The writers of such books delude themselves by thinking the holiness of their subject compensates for their unworthy mode of treating it. They imagine that truth, that the revelations of religion,

are palpable to the meanest intellect ; and through their own ignorance either fail to arrest our interest, or else succeed in filling our minds with such gloomy apprehensions, that we never revert to the subject but with aversion. Would such men could be brought to a sense of their high mission. Would they might learn that man's high destiny, and not (for ever) his sinful nature, is their glorious theme ; that our progress is without limit henceforth and for ever ; that in our likeness to God we bear a germ of all that is good ; that we have a glorious responsibility to discharge, which no ban of universal corruption or primeval sin can prevent us from fulfilling. Above all, let them teach that love and mercy, not vengeance, are the attributes of God.

“ When such truths are clothed in bold and vigorous eloquence, portrayed with the vivid conception of genius, and enforced with genuine earnestness, they must and will

attract the attention of even the most degraded minds. And assuredly, the privileged few who have the power, and opportunity of writing, should bear in mind how many thousands may be influenced by what they accidentally let fall from their pen. For, after all, men are ruled by the pen, and not by the sceptre; it must be the writers, or thinkers who guide the readers and non-thinkers. What are the statesmen of a country compared to the leading authors—those master minds, the great high priests of letters? Do not these direct the great will which chooses its own lawgivers, and dictates its own measures to the legislator? What potentate or parliament shall say ‘Peace,’ when the people say ‘There is no peace?’ Well do these real sovereigns act when they fulfil their charge, and sway the minds of men towards the love of immutable truth and virtue.”

Mr. Gregory paused, and saying he had

a letter to write before the post went out, left Pierce and Eda to take care of the slumbering Lady Dorothy.

More felt a certain awkwardness at being alone with Lady Eda, though he had before wished for the opportunity. Now that it had arrived, he was afraid of losing it unless he did something to detain her. He talked a little about Mr. Gregory. Lady Eda seemed disposed to listen. By degrees, he introduced the subject of reserve. She asked if he had written any more. He said he had not, but could illustrate his idea of the term, by relating a trifling incident which occurred to him at the moment. She agreed to listen, and he began,

“It is now some years ago. I was travelling by myself in the south of Europe. It had been a scorching day, and I had walked many miles upon a dusty mountain-road, till I was weary, sad, and footsore. Towards nightfall I came in sight of two or three cottages dotted along the side of one

of the prettiest little valleys I ever beheld. The sloping hills, covered with fruit-laden vines, reflected the last rays of the setting sun, in streams of red and yellow light. A sparkling rivulet wound snake-like through the rank verdure, which overhung its banks. The fragrant blossoms of the orange-tree breathed forth their incense to the peaceful hour. All was beautiful. As I ascended the path toward the head of the valley, the notes of a guitar reached my ear. Conducted by the sound, I reached the nearest cottage, and, raising my hat as a salutation to those before its doors, I seated myself, tired and faint, without further ceremony, on a bench by the oldest man of the party. As I wore the ordinary garb of the country, and spoke a few words in a language almost as familiar to me as my own, my arrival hardly attracted attention. I folded my arms, leant back against the wall, and forgetting the dark thoughts of those misfortunes which had made me at that time of my life, a wanderer, I

was soon lost in contemplation of the scene before me.

“ On the other side of the old man was one, who, from his age and marked features, appeared to be the son of his elder companion. This man, as I supposed, was the father of some four or five children dancing and romping on the grass, while he played, or rather accompanied his voice on the jingling instrument. Never do I remember a brighter group. Those merry little ones. Their ringing laugh echoing through the valley. Their freedom from care. Their utter ignorance of all beyond that spot and hour! Presently the game stopped; there was some difficulty. The stranger’s eye was upon them. No, it was not this; for, though by their looks they were thinking and consulting about the stranger, they evidently were not afraid of him. At last it was decided. The youngest volunteers to take the message: and what is it?

“ ‘ Will the señor come and play?’

“ ‘ Sweet child,’ I replied, ‘ the señor cannot play, he is tired.’

“ ‘ Has the señor eaten ?’

“ ‘ He will eat when the dance is over.’

“ The child’s head hung down. The other children whisper : ‘ Allegra has failed.’ But Allegra did not fail. The cloud passed away, sunshine brightened every feature. Allegra climbed the stranger’s knee. She gave one gentle kiss, then like the frightened fawn bounded rapidly away. Sweet child !” exclaimed More, lost in the remembrance of the event he had recalled. “ Sweet child ! though noblest acts of friendship be forgotten—though sacred bonds be strained and broken — though life’s hard struggle shall confirm mistrust—that kiss is fresher than the budding rose. Such simple faith shall mark my creed. When that is false, others may be true !”

The dressing-bell sounded, and Lady Eda rose to go.

"Is that a true story, Mr. More?" she asked.

"Yes. I have not intentionally coloured it," he said.

"It was a pretty incident."

"It was an instance of pure childish confidence. One of those touches of nature not easily forgotten."

"No, when they happen to people with feeling."

"It is a great misfortune, I fancy, to be blessed with too much feeling in this world. There are many things we would gladly forget, but cannot."

"Surely not when they are pleasant things?"

"Yes, when they are pleasant things; for they are joys passed for ever. Many times in my travels the pain of parting with a friend, with the almost certainty of never seeing him again, has not been counter-balanced even by the great pleasure I took in

his companionship. I would sooner not have met him."

"It is I own painful to part with people just as you get to know and to like them." It was so dark More could not see the expression of Lady Eda's face. "As it happens even to those who are shut up in old castles sometimes;" she added. He fancied the tone of her voice was sad.

"Lady Eda, I am going to-morrow. Once again in my life I shall part from those whom I would much rather I had never met."

"Are you really going? I suppose we shall not meet again for a long time. I should be sorry if it were so."

"Sorry! The thought is *painful* to me." A brief pause. "But why," his voice trembling, "why should we not meet again? We can if we will it so. There must and shall be a way. We shall meet in society—in London."

“ I never go out anywhere.”

“ Then here ! Lady Eda’s—”

“ Come, Eda, get away and dress,” said Lord Longvale, as he came down to look at the papers before dinner was announced.

CHAPTER XVII.

PIERCE did not leave Mona next morning until he had promised Lord Longvale to return for the twelfth.

While he is on the road to join Winter, we, gentle reader, availing ourselves of the Asmodean privileges of a narrator, will, if you please, place you astride, or on a pillion, as may be most convenient to your habits of equestrianism, on our grey goose quill, and—we say grey goose quill, because we have a sort of superstitious notion that this feathered and infernal missile is more closely

associated with witches, necromancers, magicians, and all disciples of the *black art*, than that villainous invention of modern ages—we are in reality using a gold pen—which either splutters all over the paper, or scratches through it, or else has a hair in the nib—and never would have been invented at all, but for the contemptible way men have of worshipping the metal it is made of—which, as all wise men, since the days of Juvenal, have predicted, will in the due course of events be eventually applied to the making of frying-pans and warming-pans, boiling-pots and other pots, and all kind of utensils, common and uncommon, noble and ignoble—a desecration that so excessively astonished the ambassadors of the Anemolians on their visit to the city of Amaurot, and will so terribly alarm the funded proprietors and personages holding fixed incomes of the day—as to—but steady—on our grey goose quill, and with a hocus pocus—this particular conjuration is most

appropriate to present locality, for be it known to the unlearned, these words are derived from *hoced* and *pwca*, the Welsh for a juggler—and with a hocus pocus, translate you from Wales to London. Excuse this jolting by the way, and please imagine yourself for a change, in company with a villain.

It was on the very day Pierce left London for Mona Castle—remember, we are a week or two younger than we were—that Winter called at the Albany to see if his *friend* was gone. Finding he was not at home, he asked the porter if Mr. More had left town. The porter replied in the affirmative, and begged for his address, as a man had left a letter which he had promised to forward. The constant state of suspicion enjoyed by a guilty mind is perhaps not unknown to the best of us. We do not pretend to explain, why Winter desired to see that letter, it might have been from a good-natured wish to carry it to his friend, whom he expected

to join in a few days. Whatever his secret motive, the last was his overt one. The letter was produced, Winter read its direction, told the porter he would forward or deliver it, put it in his pocket and walked away.

The quiet of Saville Row enabled him to read Taylor's letter to More without interruption. "So, so, Mr. Taylor," he muttered between his teeth, "I'll be even with you, my eaves-dropping friend, yet! Taylor?" he suddenly exclaimed, stopping short, and knitting his brows as if to aid his memory. "Taylor? Taylor? No! there's nobody I know of that name, and yet I've seen the handwriting before. Again he stopped and examined the letter carefully. "By God!" he said, starting, and turning deadly pale, "that's *his* writing! They told me he was dead—and he is here—here in correspondence with More, come to d—n everything at the moment I was within a hair's-breadth of getting what would have made me safe for ever."

As he walked with furious strides towards his rooms, brushing against people in the street with such violence as to make many a quick-tempered man turn and tell him to mind where he was going — fifty schemes passed through his artful brain, but none of them afforded the slightest relief to his anxiety.

His chief thought was how to rid himself of Taylor. Murder was the first idea, but this was too hazardous. Could he get him arrested for any crime? Taylor had thanked Pierce at the end of his letter for some act of liberality. He was evidently in want—a beggar, perhaps. A beggar! It could not be a hard matter to ruin a beggar. Could he but find him out without discovering himself, he might bribe some ruffian to swear robbery against him. But he would be hard to find. This was an insuperable difficulty.

There remained but one thing to be done. He must set off instantly for Mona, and induce More to endorse the blank bills before

Taylor could have time to make the disclosure. But here arose another difficulty. More would never endorse the bills until he had positive proof that the money was already advanced on his estate, and that he was under a great obligation to him (Winter) for procuring it. It was just possible, too, More might have some suspicion of his honesty, and would refuse to put his name to the blank bills at all. However, he would trust to his powers of deception, and make the experiment.

Alas! even this resolution afforded him only a momentary consolation. It now struck him, that if he did get a blank bill signed, which he might fill up for as large a sum as he pleased, he could not get it exchanged until the money was actually paid to More's account. It was, therefore, useless to attempt anything before he had communicated with Bellerby.

With this conclusion he at once wrote to the attorney, desiring him to pay into the hands of More's bankers ten thousand pounds,

for which sum he already possessed in writing More's direction to mortgage the Moreton estate. By return of post he received Bellerby's answer.

The attorney declared it to be utterly impossible to procure such a sum at so short a notice. He assured Winter he had advertised, and done all in his power ; that he himself had been disappointed on discovering his own inability to advance more than five thousand on the property ; but if More was inclined to sell, and he strongly recommended him to do so, he knew of a party willing to purchase a portion of the estate, to the amount of about fifteen thousand pounds.

It was clear then to Winter, that five thousand, being all Bellerby could produce, would be the utmost he could make off with. It would have been better, he thought, to have found himself in America with twice this sum. He was in for it now : the whole affair would soon blow up. It was out of the question to wait for the fifteen thousand.

He suspected Bellerby was himself the "party" who wished to purchase; and believed the attorney was trying to over-reach him. This was enough to make him cancel his promise to play into Bellerby's hands. He remembered More's speaking of money in the funds. A new method of securing that sum now occurred to him, which, when he came to think of it, was far more practicable than the blank bill scheme.

While congratulating himself upon the brilliancy of his new project, he received More's letter from Mona, pressing him to hasten thither with all speed. This much of the letter pleased him well enough. There was, however, one part of it, which so startled him, that he instantly changed his purpose of going there. "Thank God!" he exclaimed, when he observed it, "*that* was a narrow escape." The next day he wrote to More, as we have before seen, appointing a meeting at Conway.

Pierce was already there, inquiring for his

friend at the hotel near the railroad station, when Winter, carpet-bag in hand, arrived.

“Where is the rest of your luggage?” asked Pierce.

“This is all I have,” said the other, taken rather aback by the question.

“What! going to Ireland with nothing but a carpet-bag? I thought such swells as you never went about without two dozen portmanteaux at least. Have you dined?”

“No, how should I? Haven’t you ordered dinner?”

“Not yet, but we soon will.”

The waiter was summoned, and the dinner ordered as soon as it could be got ready. Meanwhile, the two companions sauntered away to the bridges. Winter refused to talk business, as he called it, till after dinner; and plied More with endless interrogations concerning his stay at Mona. Pierce, nothing loth to talk on so interesting a subject, became in a short time unusually communicative. After their walk was over—

during the whole of dinner-time—after dinner—till a late hour in the evening, Mona and Lady Eda Longvale were the sole topics of their conversation. Winter listened with the most profound attention, entered into More's feelings with the most affectionate sympathy. Wished him success with all his heart. Was quite sure Pierce would succeed. He was just the sort of fellow women took a fancy to. And though he didn't mean to flatter him—he would not soft-soap the biggest swell in England! not he—yet he would say Pierce was a catch for any girl in society. Then he rang for the waiter; and ordered a pint of pale brandy, and some hot water and sugar. More wouldn't drink. "Dash it! not drink the future Lady Eda More's health? He wasn't half a chap! To be sure, that's right!" said he. "Here's her health, and here's your's too, my boy," and Winter got up, and shook Pierce enthusiastically by the hand.

Poor Pierce! he was anything but a fool,

yet he had the misfortune, or the foible—whichever you please to call it—of being rather “soft.” Better men than he are not proof against flattery ; and after all, he only believed, as he hoped that Winter sympathized with him in earnest, that Winter really took a very amiable interest in his suit to Lady Eda, and that Winter’s opinion of his case was correct. It was a foolish want of circumspection, we know ; it was an unpardonable instance of “verdure ;” but he was young ; and had yet much to learn. There was not the shadow of a suspicion in Pierce’s heart, when he returned that pressure of the hand ; so far from it, he felt at that moment as if Winter was the kindest fellow he had ever met, and heartily wished he might soon have an opportunity of proving his affection.

Winter, on the contrary, who never gave people credit for good qualities which he himself did not possess, only received this emphatic demonstration of amiability as an indication of insincerity ; and by affecting an

imaginary change of places with More, became fully convinced that he himself must have seen through the other person's duplicity; and should unquestionably have concealed his suspicions as he supposed More to have done, by an additional pressure of his friend's hand. It was unfortunate for Pierce that Winter thought him wiser than he was; for the error caused Winter to apply means for reducing him to a state of greater obtuseness than he had been originally destined to.

Watching for a moment when More's back was turned, Winter dropped a few grains of a soporific drug into his brandy and water, the virtues of which operated so powerfully on the system of the drinker, that he was nearly overtaken by sleep before Winter had time to execute his ingenious scheme of embezzlement.

"There is only one drawback to what would otherwise be a first-rate match," observed Winter.

“What’s that?” eagerly questioned the other.

“It doesn’t, perhaps, make much difference to you after all, I dare say. And of course you have turned it over in your mind before now.”

“What is it, my dear fellow? What the deuce do you mean?”

“Her ladyship’s fortune. Of course you know she only has ten thousand pounds.”

“Indeed!” said More, rousing himself, “Indeed? Who told you that?”

“Her cousin Arthur has told me so a dozen times at least; and he considers it as rather a stingy thing of the old boy to settle so little upon her. But then you know, his family pride—there’s where it is—his family pride makes her father anxious to leave every *sous* he can with the title.”

“Well,” said Pierce, “that’s a deuced serious thing; I never thought—you see we should not be able to live very, very—not

that I care a sixpence on my own account. For I give you my word of honour as a gentleman, Winter, as far as I am concerned, I would marry her to-morrow if she would have me, though she had not a single penny to bless herself with; I would indeed! I'd sweep the streets, or beg for her, or anything in the world rather than lose her. But you see she has been brought up to live in such a magnificent way, as mistress of that big house; she never could be reconciled to living in a shabby manner. Confound it! This intelligence has given me quite a bad turn! It would be so ungenerous and selfish to—"

"Pooh! nonsense. You mustn't let that break your heart. You must pluck up and get your debts paid off; and then begin to save, and get some parliamentary job, or something of that sort."

"Ay, to be sure, I must get my debts paid, but that is easier said than done. What have you managed for me? Have you come to

terms with that old screw, Bellerby? Will he fork out?"

"No, devil a farthing! I wrote to him, and could get nothing out of him. So I took the trouble—it was most confoundedly inconvenient for me—but I took the trouble, and went down to see him."

"No, did you? Now that's what I call a good-natured act. Well?"

"Well, when I got there, I had a tremendous row with the old fool; and after a great deal of humbug, he promised at last to let you have a thousand pounds at twenty per cent; but swore he could not get a farthing on the estate, unless he sold it."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him to go to the d—l, and that I would get the money for you elsewhere. It so happened that I recollected at the time, about your having money in the funds."

"Well," said Pierce, beginning to yawn.

"And now I should recommend you to

sell out as quick as you can ; for the funds have gone up like smoke in the last day or two ; and I shouldn't wonder but you might clear something pretty by it."

" Well ?" yawning again.

" So the sooner you sell out the better."

" Ah ! just so. Well ?"

" What then would you like to do ? Perhaps you don't want the money directly, especially if you think of giving up Lady Eda."

" Who said I was going to give up Lady Eda ? I ain't going to do any such thing—I have not the smallest intention."

" Then the sooner you pay off your debts the better."

" Just so—very true"—a yawn—" the sooner I pay my debts the better. But how am I to get the money ?"

" Come to London and draw it." Winter knew the power of attraction at Mona.

" Not I, I would see London d—d first.

Can't you get it for me? I would write to my agent—only he's such an ass."

"I dare say I could manage it for you somehow; but you must give me a power of attorney to do it." Winter's face, as he spoke, was pale with eagerness.

"Eh?" said More.

"A power of attorney," repeated Winter, as carelessly as he could.

"Power of 'torny! what's that?" yawning and turning over in his chair to sleep.

"Why, you've only got to sign a bit of paper which enables me to draw the money for you."

A snore. Winter shook him.

"I say, Pierce, old fellow, come, wake up!"

"What is it?"

"Why, I want to settle this for you, for I must be off before daylight in the morning."

"Settle it! then why don't you?"

"Yes, yes, but you must sign this—look!"

“Where is it, then?”

“Here,” said Winter, producing the legal warrant; “you’ve only got to scratch your name along here—see!”

Now whether it was that Winter’s finger trembled, as he pointed to the place for the signature, or whether the wakening effects of getting out of his arm-chair gave More a disinclination to sign, we cannot say. Certain it is, however, he did feel unwilling to put his name to a legal paper, transferring the power over his property from himself to Winter. Not that he read the paper—he could not fix his eyes on the printed words without instantly becoming dizzy; but he had an unwillingness to sign.

“Well, why don’t you go a-head, old fellow? Can’t you see to write?” said Winter, laughing.

“Oh yes!” he replied, “I can see to write well enough.” He could not answer the other part of the question.

“Then why don’t you write,” said Winter,

“you are not afraid that I want to *cheat* you, are you?”

This was an artful stroke. Of course, More could not say he was afraid Winter would *cheat* him, and therefore was obliged to sign to prove his confidence.

“I tell you what,” said Pierce, “I’ll just date this a week hence. I shall be in town then ; so we shall be able to see about it together, and then, old fellow, I dare say I can help you.”

Winter bit his nails to the quick ; he had no reply to make. More signed the warrant, rolled into his chair, and was soon sound asleep.

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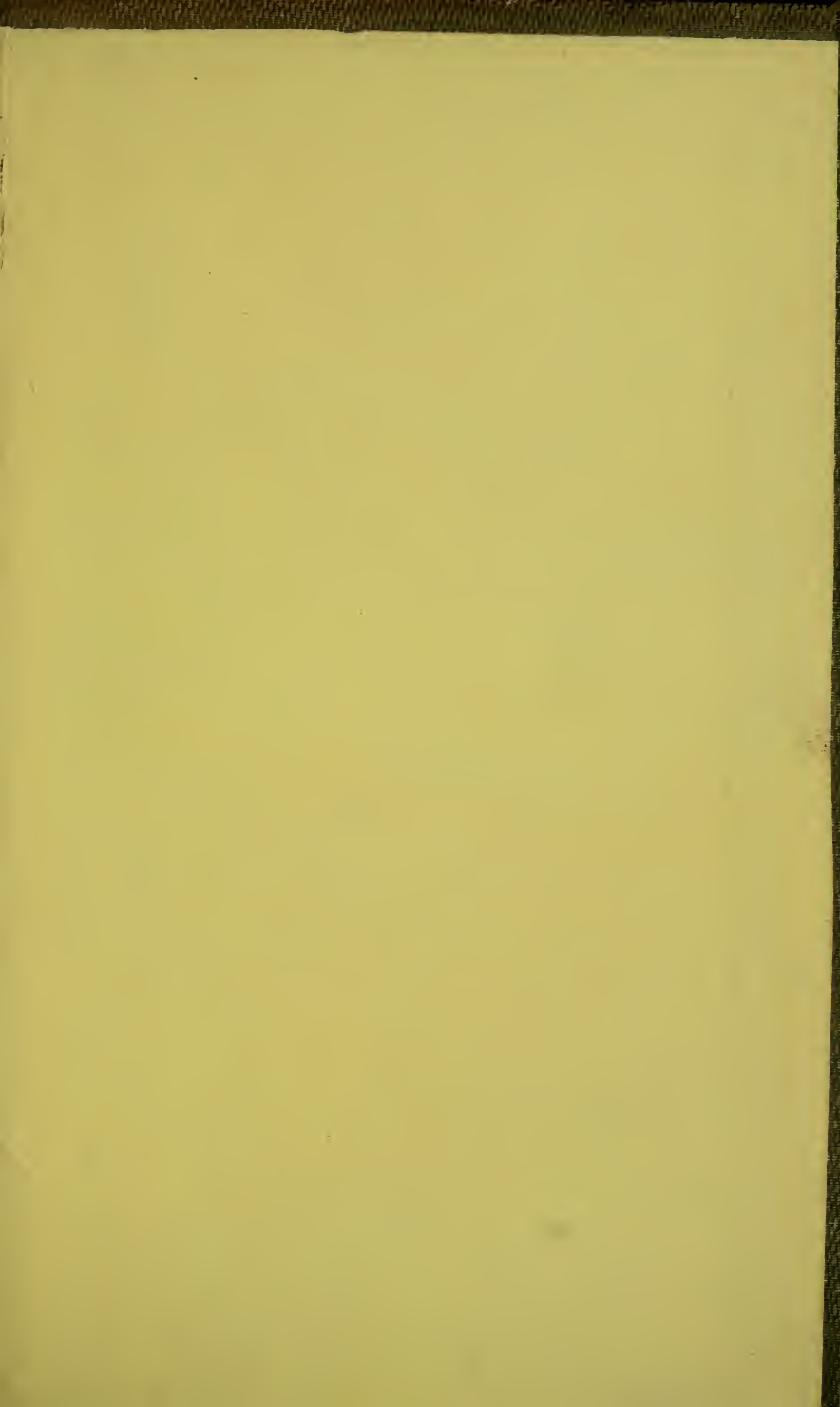
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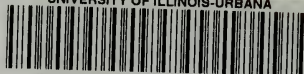








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